

Pathway Home:

Responding to Homelessness in Tulare County

November 2019



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Tulare County (“County”) can overcome the homelessness crisis we are currently facing. It will require a **collaborative effort** engaging all sectors of the community. It will require **one comprehensive plan** that all jurisdictions—the County establishment, cities of Dinuba, Exeter, Farmersville, Lindsay, Porterville, Tulare, Visalia, Woodlake, and the many other smaller jurisdictions—can adopt and invest in. It will require a **focus on solutions** that can be impactful and have long-term effects. It will require **significant investment in housing**; delay will be costly and result in a worsening crisis. Mostly, it will require **recognizing the humanity** of the thousands of individuals and families impacted by the crisis.

We are at a critical juncture; we will only succeed through a collaborative effort, with investment from every sector and every jurisdiction.

The County has already done a great deal to address homelessness. Over the past five years, the community has adopted a Housing First approach in many programs, working to ensure people have a safe place to sleep at night. The Continuum of Care has established a Coordinated Entry System and – with the assistance of service providers, community-based organizations, developers, the Tulare County Health and Human Services Agency, cities, and others – has obtained federal, state and local funding to increase its ability to provide housing and vital supportive services. This work lays a strong foundation upon which the community can build.

Yet, homelessness continues to increase in Tulare County and across California. The need is urgent. We are at a critical juncture; **we will only succeed through a collaborative effort, with participation from every sector and every jurisdiction.**

Homelessness is a community priority; it impacts everyone, from our neighbors who are unstably housed to those who have already fallen into homelessness, to our first responders, to all who will benefit from **community-wide strategies** that systemically and effectively resolve homelessness. Together we must coordinate **key resources** available across **all sectors** of the community. We are on a precipice and now is the time to focus on meaningful solutions, rather than simply treating the symptoms.

This Strategic Plan: “Pathway Home: Responding to Homelessness in Tulare County,” provides a set of goals tailored for our community that have been proven to be successful. It is a **roadmap** of how to address homelessness, based on local needs and strategies and tactics that work. To effectively address the crisis, the entire community — every corner of the county — needs to participate in solutions. Solutions are far less costly, far more humane, and the only way to create a system that effectively addresses homelessness.

The Goals for the Community are Clear:



Increase Access to Permanent Housing



Increase Access to Services to Support Exits from Homelessness



Expand Services for Subpopulations with Special Needs



Prevent Homelessness for Those at Risk



Strengthen Public Engagement and Community Partnerships



Increase Access to Permanent Housing

Permanent housing is the primary and most effective solution to ending homelessness. It brings security and safety, allowing individuals and families to focus their efforts on maintaining a job, getting the kids to school, and preserving their health and well-being. For some people experiencing homelessness, additional supportive services are also needed — help with independent living skills, job training, case management — assistance that allows people to achieve stability, long-term self-sufficiency, and most importantly, housing.



Increase Access to Services to Support Exits from Homelessness

With more than 70% of people experiencing homelessness in Tulare County living outside – on the streets, in vehicles, by the river – the community needs to address unsheltered homelessness. The cities, County, nonprofits and other partners can collaborate to help those most in need get the services and support they require to exit

homelessness by expanding outreach, targeting services, and developing accessible crisis shelters with tailored, housing-focused programming throughout the area.



Expand Services for Subpopulations with Special Needs

Within Tulare County, there are people at risk of or experiencing homelessness who require special attention. By understanding their special needs and directing services that allow professionals to focus and tailor their care, we can ensure that the system is accessible to some of the most vulnerable members within the community.



Prevent Homelessness for Those at Risk

As the housing crisis in California deepens, more and more people are just one paycheck or medical crisis away from losing their housing. Often it only requires a small intervention to prevent them from becoming homeless — whether it is one-time financial resources to provide a security deposit, legal assistance to prevent eviction, or help learning to balance a budget. Preventing homelessness by supporting individuals and families before they become homeless is not only more humane, but also more cost-effective.



Strengthen Public Engagement and Community Partnerships

Deeper partnerships and greater engagement throughout the region can strengthen and build leadership and community support for solutions to more effectively address homelessness. Collaboration and coordination can enable our community to effectively accomplish more, better, faster. The public and private systems that were created to help people in times of need are often patchwork. Programs have different eligibility requirements, are run by different agencies, and often don't work collaboratively to address the entire set of needs that an individual or family may present. Improving collaboration and coordination and broadening our investments across the many systems of care in Tulare County can help the community more effectively address homelessness.

There is not one strategy standing alone that will achieve the goal of ending homelessness in Tulare County. To be successful, the community needs a systematic and multi-faceted approach that engages the entire community – it requires investments from both the public and private sectors, dedicated resources with a laser focus on proven strategies, and collaboration and coordination across all sectors.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In 2011, the Continuum of Care on Homelessness that includes Tulare County released “Connecting the Dots,” a Ten-Year Plan to address homelessness in the region. Since then, local partners have made great strides in developing a system to respond to homelessness and reduce its impact on the community.

While homelessness continues to be an evolving challenge in Tulare County and across California, local accomplishments since 2011 have established an invaluable foundation for continued progress in addressing homelessness.



Connecting the Dots' Goals:



Achievements

Expand housing available to homeless individuals and families



- ✓ 146 Permanent Supportive Housing beds added in Tulare County since 2012
- ✓ 71 Rapid Rehousing beds added in Tulare County since 2012 (including bi-county SSVF)

Develop a Coordinated Entry System to prioritize available resources



- ✓ Every Door Open Coordinated Entry System has connected over 217 Kings and Tulare County residents to housing interventions as of June 30, 2019

Support a Housing First approach



- ✓ 100% of CoC and ESG program-funded projects are now Housing First

Establish integrated service teams, outreach events, and a “homeless liaison” in County programs to engage people experiencing homelessness



- ✓ Established HOPE Team and Outreach Case Manager in Visalia, Countywide PATH Outreach and Housing Navigator programs
- ✓ Launched the Local Initiatives Navigation Center (LINC) program in Visalia and Tulare
- ✓ Project Homeless Connect events are held annually in three cities, serving 693 people in 2019
- ✓ HHSA created Homeless Initiatives Program Coordinator position to coordinate HHSA-specific programs

Enhance access for homeless people to mainstream benefits



- ✓ 2-1-1 provides thousands of Tulare County residents with connections to services
- ✓ Staff trained in SOAR connect people to Social Security resources (SSI/SSDI)
- ✓ Number of homeless people receiving SSI/SSDI increased by 161% between 2015 and 2019

Establish a regular forum for people to meet to discuss local homelessness issues



- ✓ Tulare Countywide Task Force on Homelessness established in 2017 to coordinate countywide homelessness response
- ✓ Kings/Tulare Continuum of Care and local homeless service providers meet several times per month to discuss best practices and strengthen impact

Provide trainings and community education on issues related to homelessness



- ✓ Kings/Tulare Homeless Alliance and the Countywide Task Force provide public trainings and education around homelessness and key strategies for responding
- ✓ Annual Kings/Tulare Homeless Alliance Point in Time Count reports use data to explain the state of homelessness in Tulare County
- ✓ Kings/Tulare Homeless Alliance best practices trainings support providers in strengthening outcomes
- ✓ Kings/Tulare Homeless Alliance implemented a mandatory Case Management curriculum for all CoC-funded providers

Despite these significant steps forward, homelessness in Tulare County – and across California – is continuing to rise, due to high rates of poverty and escalating costs of housing. Without meaningful, coordinated action, homelessness will continue to grow, as more of our community members lose their housing and are unable to overcome the barriers to exiting homelessness.

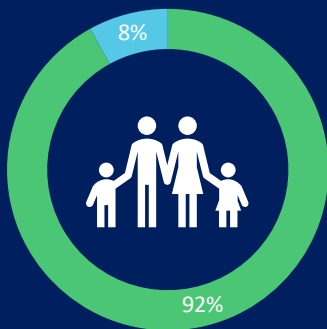
On a given night in 2019, there were 814 men, women and children experiencing homelessness in Tulare County, with 576 of those people living unsheltered on the streets, in vehicles, or in encampments. More than 90% of these individuals had their last stable residence in Tulare County.

While there are many reasons Tulare County residents may fall into homelessness – reduced work hours, medical bills or an unexpected expense, loss of a relative or mental health issues – these members of the community are living without stable housing or the support to regain it.

This Strategic Plan is based on the latest in available data and established best practices to provide an ambitious but achievable roadmap for meaningfully addressing homelessness in Tulare County. It represents the input of numerous stakeholders, including the private and public sectors, homeless service providers, housing developers, public health and behavioral health experts, and members of the faith-based community, among many others.

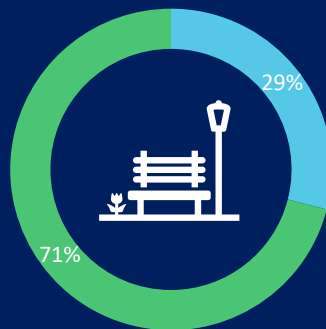
This Plan also meets the requirements of the California Department of Housing and Community Development’s No Place Like Home program, to ensure eligibility for state funding sources that can support crucial resources in addressing homelessness in Tulare County.

People Experiencing Homelessness



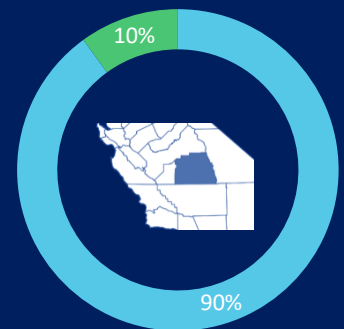
■ Adults ■ Children

Sheltered or Unsheltered



■ Sheltered ■ Unsheltered

Last Stable Residence



■ Tulare County ■ Other

II. STRATEGIC PLAN AND IMPLEMENTATION

Strategic planning processes are important and impactful. They help facilitate community-wide prioritization of key actions, foster creative and collaborative problem-solving, and provide a platform to consider resource needs and opportunities. A strategic plan is necessary to qualify for certain state and federal funding and can help bring in new resources to implement needed solutions. Having an intentional, shared plan for a coordinated homelessness response positions the Tulare County community to work together and implement the most effective strategies in addressing this community-wide challenge.

The Planning Process

This strategic plan reflects feedback and input from hundreds of community members, developed over a five-month community process. Grounded on prior work, including the Ten-Year Plan (“[Connecting the Dots](#)”) and a gaps analysis conducted in the Fall of 2018, the strategic planning process included:



Over 40 Interviews



Nearly 650 Surveys



75+ Stakeholder
Summit Participants

- An **environmental scan** of existing reports, data and research about Tulare County, the cities in the region and the health and economic well-being of the community, including homelessness and the system of care;
- **Stakeholder interviews** with more than 40 representatives from cities, County agencies, health care systems, community-based organizations, service providers, and faith-based organizations;
- **Focus groups** with direct service providers and people with lived experience of homelessness;
- A **half-day Community Summit** with more than 75 elected officials, County staff, city staff, service providers, community-based organizations, law enforcement, faith-based organizations, and individual community members;
- **Topical committee meetings** focused on increasing housing, solutions to addressing unsheltered homelessness, public communications and engagement, and strengthening supportive services for people experiencing homelessness;
- **Nearly 650 completed community surveys**, including feedback from people with lived experience of homelessness, service providers, and community leaders; and
- A series of **presentations and discussions** at public meetings of the Tulare Countywide Task Force on Homelessness.

Through this process, the community identified **the following priorities for a local vision** to respond to homelessness in the County:

-
- ✓ **Create a culture of collaboration and connectivity** throughout the entire region, within and among jurisdictions, across the full spectrum of the homelessness system of care, and in partnership with other safety net systems.
 - ✓ **Promote a person-centered approach that is trauma-informed, empathetic and effective** for those at risk of or experiencing homelessness.
 - ✓ **Communicate broadly about local successes and challenges** in dealing with homelessness in a way that is transparent and dispels myths and misunderstandings about homelessness and the local response.
 - ✓ **Align the system so that there is no redundancy**, resources are committed that match the community's needs, and all key partners are accountable for supporting the solutions.
 - ✓ **Foster a better understanding of how people enter homelessness** and embrace solutions that prevent homelessness from occurring at all.
-

Partners in Ending Homelessness

The Tulare County region benefits from a strong network of formal and informal partnerships to address homelessness. Key partners, all of whom were involved in developing this Strategic Plan, include people with lived experience of homelessness, family caregivers of people living with severe mental health issues, service providers, and local leaders to set a vision for shared goals and strategies.

Planning Coordination and Leadership. The development of this plan has been guided by the leadership of the Tulare Countywide Task Force on Homelessness and the Kings/Tulare Homeless Alliance.

Strategic Planning Partners. Together, the Tulare community has leveraged invaluable partnerships and cross-community coordination to respond to homelessness and develop the next steps described in this Strategic Plan. The following is a non-exhaustive list of partners actively engaged in addressing homelessness in Tulare County.



County Government Agencies and Officials

- Tulare County Health and Human Services (including Mental Health, Child Welfare Services, TulareWORKs, Public Health Branch, Kings/Tulare Area Agency on Aging, Alcohol and Other Drugs, Veteran's Services Office)
- Tulare County Board of Supervisors
- Tulare County Transit Agency
- Tulare County Community Action Agency (CSET)
- Tulare Office of Education
- Tulare County Sheriff's Office
- Tulare County Administration Office



Additional Partners

- Faith-Based Community Leaders
- Community Service Organizations
- Kings/Tulare Homeless Alliance
- Workforce Investment Board of Tulare County
- United Way of Tulare County
- Kings United Way



City Government Agencies and Officials

- City of Visalia
- City of Tulare
- City of Porterville
- City of Farmerville
- City of Dinuba
- Elected Officials
- Police Departments



Housing

- Housing Authority
- Affordable Housing Developers



Community Based Organizations

- Nonprofit Direct Service Providers
- Resource Centers

Strategic Plan Implementation

The Strategic Plan identifies **five goals crucial** to addressing homelessness in Tulare County in the years ahead:



Together, these five goals are key to stemming the tide of the escalating crisis and addressing the growing impacts of homelessness on the Tulare County community.

Achieving these goals, however, will require community-wide investment and commitment. Communities successful in addressing homelessness have done so only through partnerships across multiple systems, sectors, and jurisdictions. Through these partnerships, key stakeholders across the community coordinate to commit resources and personnel, support public engagement and understanding of homelessness and its solutions, and actively measure and report successes and challenges.

Successful implementation of this Strategic Plan includes:

- **Leadership and coordination** by the Tulare Countywide Task Force
- **Jurisdictional Action Committees** to carry forward strategies at the local level
- **Dedicated Topical Committees** (e.g., Housing, Supportive Services)
- **Quarterly progress reporting** by Committees to the Task Force
- **Annual evaluation** and public reporting of progress, challenges, and next steps for the year ahead
- **Backbone staffing** to facilitate and coordinate implementation across stakeholders

III. HOMELESSNESS IN TULARE COUNTY

Overview



Homelessness in Tulare County impacts everyone in the community. Despite effective programs and dedicated providers, the number of people experiencing homelessness in Tulare County is continuing to increase, in line with steep increases in homelessness across California. Each year, hundreds of Tulare County residents – neighbors, friends, and co-workers – experience a crisis that results in loss of housing. And once housing is lost, it is increasingly difficult to get back on track.



People become homeless for many reasons. Some are unable to afford skyrocketing rents. Others are working low-wage jobs that don't pay enough to cover rent, maintain a mortgage, or even put down a security deposit. For those living paycheck-to-paycheck, a few reduced working hours, a costly medical bill, or unexpected family emergency can be enough to result in a housing crisis. Still others are fleeing domestic violence or struggling with mental health issues that can make it difficult to retain stable employment. Older adults are struggling to find housing that is affordable, even with Social Security Insurance (SSI).



While homelessness, its causes and solutions are diverse and vary from person to person, the skyrocketing rates of homelessness in California are significantly driven by dramatic increases in costs of housing across the state.¹ In Tulare County, rental costs have been steadily increasing relative to wages, and the increasing cost of purchasing a home is unattainable for many residents. Median rents in the area increased by 9% between 2012 and 2017,² while the median household income increased by only 2% during the same time period.³



To truly address the crisis and develop strategies to fit the unique needs of Tulare County, we need to better understand who is experiencing homelessness in the region. The list includes veterans, young families, single adults, people with disabilities, older adults, and youth, 90% of whom had their last stable residence in Tulare County. It includes 814 people who were identified as homeless on a single night in 2019, 576 of whom were found sleeping unsheltered. This section provides a snapshot of some of the people in Tulare County who experience homelessness and the factors that contribute to the growing problem.



¹ [High costs of housing drives up homeless rates, UCLA study indicates](#), Los Angeles Times, June 13, 2018, citing [Affordability, Full Employment, and Economic Growth, the UCLA Anderson Forecast](#), June 2018.

² Tulare County Median Gross Rent Estimates in 2012 (\$805) [2012 FactFinder](#), and in 2017 (\$877), [2017 FactFinder](#) U.S. Census Bureau.

³ [Selected Economic Characteristics, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates Tulare County, California](#), American FactFinder, U.S. Census Bureau.

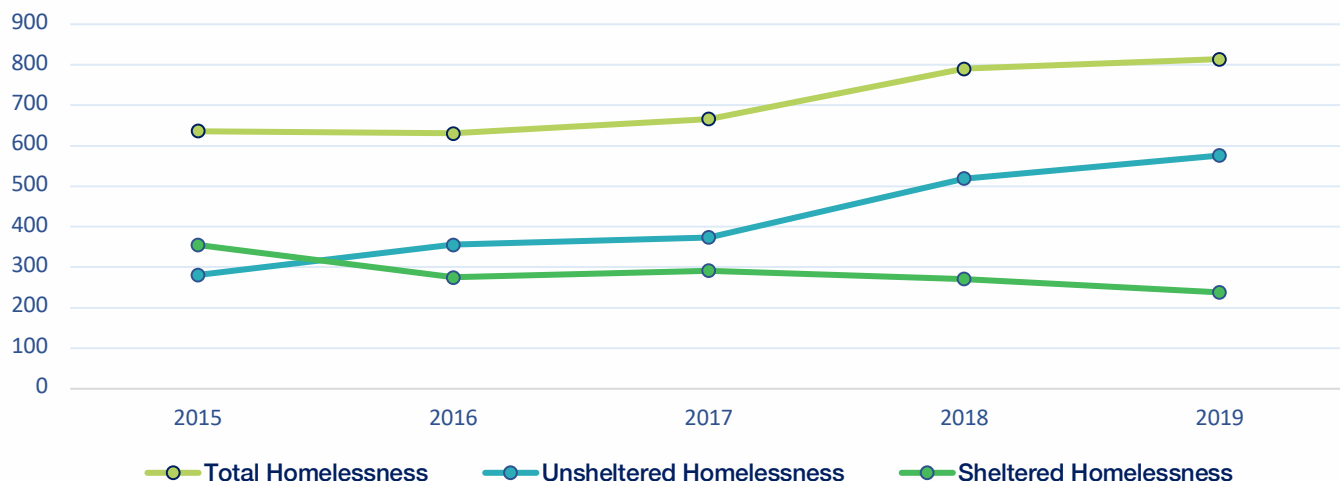
How Many People Are Experiencing Homelessness in Tulare County?

Every year, the Kings/Tulare Continuum of Care (CoC) conducts a “Point in Time” (PIT) Count of people experiencing homelessness on a single night in January. The PIT Count provides the best data available on the size and characteristics of the homeless population over time.⁴ In 2019, volunteers identified 814 individuals experiencing homelessness in Tulare County on the night of the count.

The number of people who experience homelessness in Tulare County over the course of a year, however, is much higher. This is because the Point in Time Count only measures the number of people who are homeless on a given day and does not account for the many people who fall in and out of homelessness during the rest of the year. According to the Kings/Tulare Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) database, at least 3,194 people experienced homelessness in Tulare County at some point during 2018.

Like the rest of the state, the number of people experiencing homelessness in Tulare County has increased significantly. Since 2015, the number of people identified as homeless in the Tulare County PIT Count has increased by 178 people, an increase of almost 30%.

Point-In-Time Homelessness In Tulare County



These increases are comparable to the increases experienced across California and the Central Valley.

⁴ All population data in this report is taken from the PIT Count unless otherwise specified. PIT Count reports can be found on the Kings/Tulare Homeless Alliance website here: <https://www.kthomelessalliance.org/point-in-time>. The Point in Time Count uses a definition of homelessness mandated by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). This definition counts people as homeless when they are living in a place not meant for human habitation (such as an encampment, tent, or vehicle), emergency shelters, or transitional housing. People who are doubled up or couch surfing are not counted as homeless under this definition.

Point-in-Time Count Changes: California and the Central Valley

	2015 Total	2019 Total	Increase	Unsheltered in 2019	2019 Unsheltered Percentage	Chronically Homeless in 2019	2019 Chronically Homeless Percentage
Sacramento Steps Forward⁵	2,659	5,570	+109%	3,900	70%	Not publicly available	n/a
San Joaquin CoC⁶	1,708	2,629	+54%	1,558	59%	752	29%
Stanislaus Community System of Care⁷	1,408	1,923	+37%	1,088	57%	285	15%
Fresno Madera CoC⁸	1,722	2,508	+46%	2,069	82%	698	28%
Kern County Homeless Collaborative⁹	954	1,330	+39%	805	61%	Not Reported	N/A
Tulare County (part of Kings/Tulare CoC)	636	814	+28%	576	71%	244	30%
California*¹⁰	115,738	129,972*	+12%**	89,543*	69%	34,332*	26%

* At the time of publication, California-wide aggregate data was not available for 2019, therefore California data is from 2018.

**Increase for 2015-2018, as California-wide aggregate data for 2019 was not available.

⁵ 2015 CoC Homeless Populations and Subpopulations Reports, CA-503: Sacramento City and County CoC, HUD Exchange; Homelessness in Sacramento County: Results from the 2019 Point-in-Time Count, California State University for Sacramento Steps Forward, June 2019.

⁶ 2015 CoC Homeless Populations and Subpopulations Reports, CA-511: Stockton/San Joaquin County CoC, HUD Exchange; San Joaquin Continuum of Care Report on the Point in time Count of the Sheltered and Unsheltered Homeless, April 2019.

⁷ 2015 CoC Homeless Populations and Subpopulations Reports, CA-510: Turlock, Modesto/Stanislaus County CoC, HUD Exchange; 2019 Stanislaus County Point-In-Time Count Survey Results, Modestogov.com.

⁸ 2015 CoC Homeless Populations and Subpopulations Reports, CA-514: Fresno City and County/Madera County CoC, HUD Exchange; 2019 HDX Competition Report, PIT Count Data for CA-514 - Fresno City & County/Madera County CoC.

⁹ 2015 CoC Homeless Populations and Subpopulations Reports, CA-604: Bakersfield/Kern County CoC, HUD Exchange; 2019 Homeless Point-in-Time County Reflects 50% Increase, Kern County Homeless Collaborative, 2019

¹⁰ 2015 CoC Homeless Populations and Subpopulations Report – California, HUD Exchange; 2018 CoC Homeless Populations and Subpopulations Report – California, HUD Exchange.

Where do People Experiencing Homelessness Stay?

The vast majority – at least 71% – of people experiencing homelessness in Tulare County are living unsheltered on the street or another outdoor location, in a vehicle, in abandoned buildings, or encampments. The rate of unsheltered homelessness has increased significantly since 2015 when 56% of people experiencing homelessness were sheltered and only 44% were unsheltered. While homelessness has increased by 178 people since 2015, the number of available emergency shelter beds has decreased by 11.5% over the same time period.

People who live unsheltered are more vulnerable than other people experiencing homelessness. By living unsheltered, they are exposed to greater risks, often are in poorer health, and have less access to health care services. They are more likely to have behavioral health challenges and/or be involved in the criminal justice system. And, they are more likely to experience premature death.

Many of those living without shelter are the community's most vulnerable residents. Over 83% of homeless veterans, 86% of older adults 55 years and older, and 89% of homeless adults with disabilities are unsheltered. As a result, many of those who most need treatment, care and support are living without shelter, often in remote locations or encampments, disconnected from services.

Place Slept Last Night 2019 PIT Count:

Transitional Housing



15%

Emergency Shelter



14%

Unsheltered



71%

Veterans



83% Unsheltered

Disability



89% Unsheltered

Unaccompanied Youth



49% Unsheltered

Adults 55+



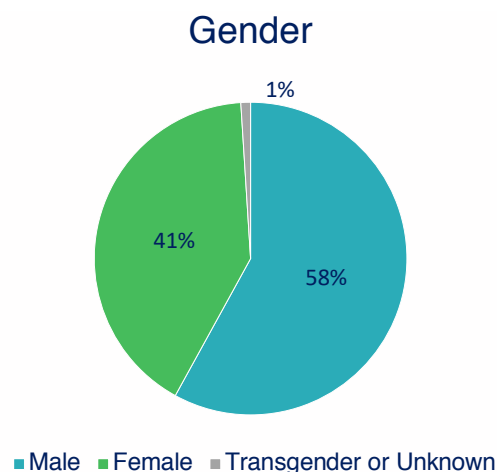
86% Unsheltered

Who is Experiencing Homelessness in Tulare County?

Homelessness in Tulare County is a crisis both invisible and visible. While the community's growing unsheltered population has been the source of significant public attention, homelessness for many other residents is more hidden. This can result in misunderstandings about the tremendous diversity of Tulare County residents – families and individuals, young children and seniors – who are experiencing the crisis of homelessness and require additional support to return to housing.

Gender

While men comprise the majority of people experiencing homelessness in the County, over 40% of people experiencing homelessness are women. Seventy-three percent of men experiencing homelessness are living unsheltered, while 67% of women are sleeping without a roof over their heads. Women who are homeless are at particularly high risk of experiencing assault, victimization, and other physical harm, especially if living unsheltered.



Families with Children and Young Adults

The 2019 PIT Count identified 32 households with children and 48 households with unaccompanied or parenting youth (ages 18-24) experiencing homelessness. While the overall number of unaccompanied youth has gone down since 2015 (61 in 2015, 55 in 2019), more and more youth are living unsheltered, increasing from 38% in 2015 to 44% in 2019. Over 1 in 5 homeless families with children are living without shelter.

Over the course of a year, many more Tulare County children experience homelessness than are captured in the PIT Count. Under the federal McKinney-Vento Act, schools are also required to track students experiencing homelessness, using a definition of homelessness that also includes youth who are couch surfing or doubled-up (e.g., with multiple families sharing the same space).¹¹ In the 2017-18 school year, Tulare County schools reported 3,150 school age children experiencing homelessness under that definition.¹²

¹¹ 42 U.S.C. §11434(2)(B), McKinney-Vento Act, U.S. Department of Education.

¹² See excel spreadsheet, [County Office Homeless Liaison Contact List with 2017-18 Enrollment information](#), line 58, "Homeless Enrolled," California Department of Education, April 25, 2019.

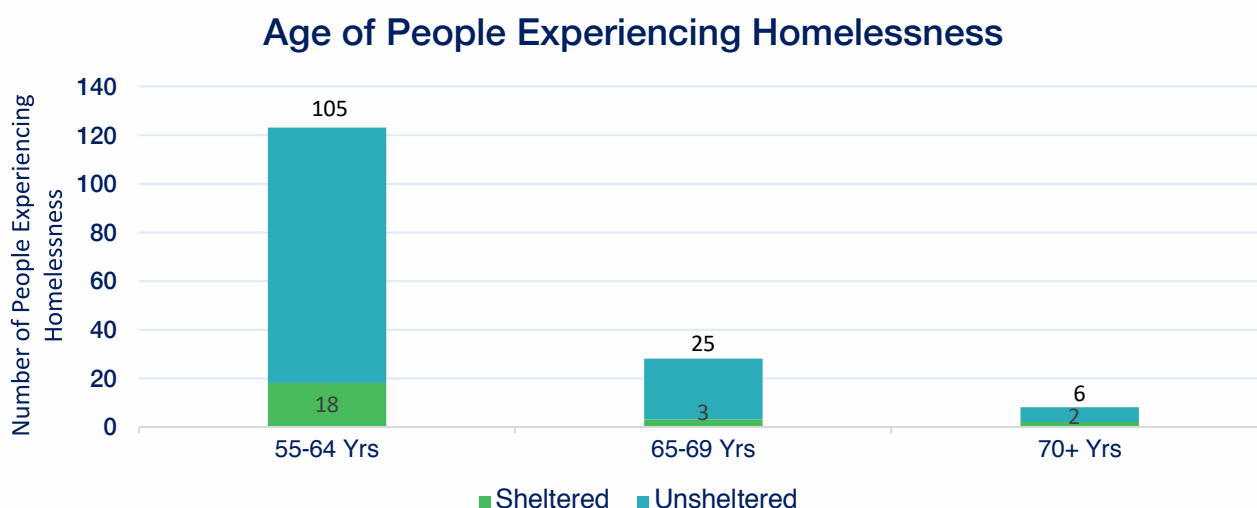
Survivors of Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is a significant cause and consequence of homelessness. In Tulare County, over 10% of those who responded to the survey question (46 out of 436) indicated that they were currently fleeing domestic violence.

People who are fleeing domestic violence often lack the resources or support networks to obtain other permanent housing. Domestic violence survivors are faced with complicated situations and hard choices that make it harder for them to stay safe or find secure permanent housing, such as insufficient credit or rental history. Many women may enter unsafe situations in an effort to escape homelessness.

Older Adults

Consistent with national patterns, the homeless population in Tulare County is rapidly aging. The number of people experiencing homelessness in 2019 who were at least 55 years old (159 people) has almost doubled since 2015 (85 people). Adults age 55 or older now account for 1 out of every 5 individuals who are homeless, and this number is expected to continue to increase, due in part to the high costs of housing and health care that are increasingly unaffordable.¹³



Older adults who are homeless face unique challenges and often require special support. People experiencing homelessness age more rapidly than others who are housed and older adults with extensive histories of homelessness typically present as much older than their biological age reflects.¹⁴ They may be more challenged with activities of daily living, with poor eyesight, balance, and hearing challenges. Older adults are also more likely to suffer from cognitive impairments and are more likely to present with depression. They may require more

¹³ [Demographics of Homelessness Series: The Rising Elderly Population](#), April 2010.

¹⁴ [Homeless people suffer geriatric conditions decades early. UCSF study shows](#), UCSF, February 2016.

medical interventions, compared to the general population of people experiencing homelessness. Despite the special needs and vulnerability of seniors experiencing homelessness in Tulare County, 86% of homeless older adults over age 64 were living unsheltered.

Veterans

Forty-eight Veterans of the U.S. military were counted in Tulare County during the 2019 PIT Count with 40 living unsheltered, living in cars, encampments or on the streets. One out of two Veterans are chronically homeless, meaning that they have a disability and have been homeless for an extended length of time (at least a year).

Persons with Disabilities

Over half of the people identified during the 2019 PIT Count have at least one disability – and many have multiple chronic conditions that make it difficult to complete normal day-to-day activities. Some of these individuals became homeless due to complications relating to their disabilities, while many others may have acquired their disabilities or had their disabilities compounded due to the trauma of being homeless.

Of the 532 homeless adults with disabilities, 89% were living without shelter. Close to half are chronically homeless, which means they have been homeless for at least one year.

Of the 453 homeless adults reporting barriers:



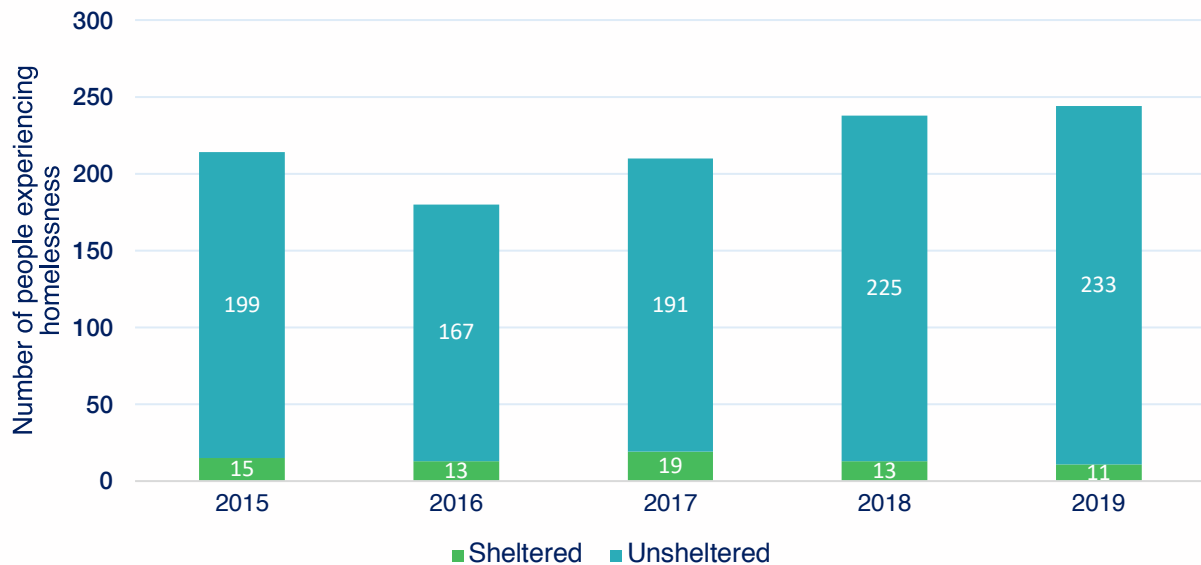
Chronically Homeless

According to the 2019 PIT Count, 244 Tulare County residents were identified as chronically homeless. A person is considered chronically homeless when they have been homeless for at least a year, either 12 months consecutively or over the course of at least 4 separate occasions in the past 3 years. To be chronically homeless, the individual or head of household must also have a disability. Over 95% of chronically homeless persons live unsheltered.

People who are considered chronically homeless have often experienced extensive trauma and have severe service needs. While interventions such as Permanent Supportive Housing have been proven to be extremely effective in supporting people experiencing chronic homelessness

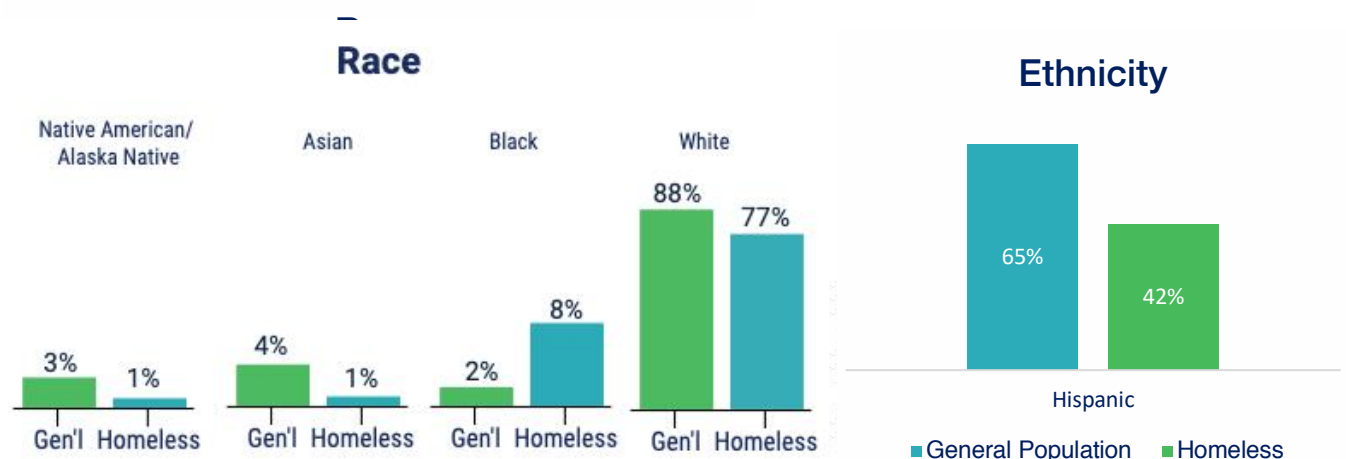
to regain stable housing, people with extensive histories of homelessness often require intensive service engagement and relationship-building with street outreach and other providers to establish a foundation of trust and rapport to successfully exit homelessness.

Chronically Homeless Individuals 2015-2019



Race and Ethnicity

The burden of homelessness disproportionately impacts certain people of color in Tulare County. While 88% of Tulare County's population is white, only 77% of the people experiencing homelessness are white. Yet, while only 2% of the Tulare County population are Black, Black people experiencing homelessness comprise 8% of the overall homeless population. In contrast, while 65% of Tulare County residents identify as Hispanic/Latino, this group makes up only 42% of the homeless population.¹⁵



¹⁵ [Tulare County, California Quick Facts](#), U.S. Census Bureau.

No Place Like Home Target Population/Persons Experiencing Homelessness with Behavioral Health Challenges

Adults/Older Adults with Serious Mental Illness (SMI):

While severe mental illness (SMI) disproportionately impacts people experiencing homelessness, many Tulare County residents who are not experiencing homelessness also suffer from mental illness and other challenges. In the Tulare/Kings/Kern/Inyo County region, 18% of adults (age 18 and older) reported that they had a mental illness. Four percent reported a serious mental illness, 11% received mental health services within the year, and 4% had serious thoughts of suicide.¹⁶

Of the 3,194 people experiencing homelessness who received services in 2018, 17% reported a serious mental illness, while 5% have co-occurring disorders, and 4% have both a physical disability and serious mental illness.¹⁷

The chart below indicates how those with serious mental illness, co-occurring disorders, and physical disability and SMI experience homelessness in the County (whether in permanent supportive housing, Rapid Rehousing, transitional housing, in shelters, or unsheltered).

SMI/Co-Occurring Disorders in HMIS (2018):

	Total Homeless	Chronically Homeless	In PSH	In RRH	In TH	In Shelter	Unsheltered
Total Persons	3,194	14%	2.5%	1.3%	5.6%	35%	55%
SMI	17%	28%	7%	<1%	2%	6%	43%
Co-occurring disorders	5%	53%	10%	1%	5%	8%	75%
Physical Disability and SMI	4%	49%	9%	<1%	0%	9%	81%

While only 7% of the total population of Tulare County identified as having a mental or physical disability in 2018, those rates are significantly higher for those experiencing homelessness in 2019.

¹⁶ The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) is an annual survey conducted from January through December of people age 12 or older and is sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The survey collects information from individuals residing in households, noninstitutionalized group quarters (e.g., shelters, rooming houses, dormitories), and civilians living on military bases. Most of the data is reported for the state of California, but there is some information broken down by subregions of a state. Tulare County data is part of region 17R and includes Kings, Kern, and Inyo county information. There is no publicly available data for Tulare County individually. [2014-2016 NSDUH substate region estimates](#).

¹⁷ This data is from the Kings/Tulare Homeless Management Information System (HMIS).

Percentage of Homeless Adults who Responded to the Question Whether They were Living with Barriers Including Mental Illness, Substance Use Disorder, or Physical Disability (2019 Point-in-Time Count)

	Mental Illness	Substance Use Disorder	Physical Disability
Homeless	45%	32%	40%
Chronically Homeless	61%	37%	54%

Children with Severe Emotional Disturbance:

Although data regarding the number of children with a serious emotional disturbance is not fully tracked by any single source, there are a variety of resources that identify the number of children and youth receiving mental health services.

Children and youth enrolled in the Medi-Cal program are eligible for Specialty Mental Health Services. Over 6,000 children and young adults up to age 21 (4.6% of Medi-Cal enrollees) received Specialty Mental Health Services in Tulare County in Fiscal Year 2016-17.¹⁸ Of those, more than 4,200, or 69%, had five or more specialty mental health services within the year.¹⁹ Seven hundred Tulare County children and youth received continuous specialty mental services with no breaks in service greater than 90 days for a period of at least 2 years.²⁰

Reasons for Homelessness in Tulare County

Poverty and Unemployment

As one of the poorest counties in California, Tulare County residents often experience a dual burden of depressed income and escalating housing costs. Nearly 1 in 4 families were living below the federal poverty line in 2017 (for 2019, that means income of less than \$25,750 for a family of four).²¹ With a median household income at 33% less than the average statewide, many Tulare County households are living paycheck to paycheck.²² As a result, a single crisis – an expensive medical bill, lost wages to care for a family member, reduction in work hours or a job loss – can result in loss of home. Tulare County also experiences some of the highest unemployment in the state. In 2018, residents experienced unemployment at twice the rate of California or the U.S. as a whole.²³

¹⁸ [Performance Outcomes System, County-level reports, Tulare County](#), Department of Health Care Services, September 2018

¹⁹ Ibid, page 9. The mean service needs across the population, per each unique beneficiary, included 11 days in a psychiatric health facility, 16.75 hours per beneficiary for full day intensive treatment, and 3.4 hours of crisis intervention. Ibid, page 11.

²⁰ Ibid, page 14.

²¹ [Selected Economic Characteristics, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates](#) Tulare County, California, American FactFinder, U.S. Census Bureau.

²² [Selected Economic Characteristics, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates](#) State of California, American FactFinder, U.S. Census Bureau.

²³ [Visalia/Porterville/Metropolitan Statistical Area \(MSA\), Tulare County](#), California Employment Development Division, August 16, 2019.

Rates of Unemployment, Poverty, and Median Income: California and the Central Valley

Location	Unemployment ²⁴	Poverty ²⁵	Median Income ²⁶
Fresno County	7.3%	21%	\$48,730
Kern County	8.4%	21%	\$50,826
Merced County	8.4%	23%	\$46,338
Sacramento County	4%	14%	\$60,239
San Joaquin County	6.3%	15%	\$57,813
Stanislaus County	6.6%	14%	\$54,260
Tulare County	10%	24%	\$44,871
Total California	3.5%	13%	\$67,169
Total United States	3.4%	12%	\$57,652

Rising Costs of Housing

California is in a housing crisis – and particularly an affordable housing crisis. Across the state – and throughout the country – affordable housing is less and less available; rent prices are increasing at an alarming rate, impacting individuals and families working hard at minimum or low-wage jobs, seniors and people with disabilities on fixed incomes, and single-income families with children. More and more people are devoting a significant portion of their income to housing costs. For many, that means homelessness is just one health crisis, missed paycheck, or family tragedy away.

Tulare County is not immune to the crisis. As part of the Central Valley, Tulare County resides in one of the only regions in the state that had a decline in the number of active single-family listings between 2018 and 2019.²⁷ At the same time, the median price of single-family homes in Tulare County increased by 2.5%.²⁸ The minimum qualifying income for a median cost home in Tulare County is 9% higher than the median area household income.²⁹

In 2017, the average family of four in Tulare County spent over \$10,000 a year (\$842 per month) on housing.³⁰ For 1 in 4 families in Tulare County living below the federal poverty level, housing costs make up at least 40% of their income.³¹

²⁴ [Metropolitan Statistical Area \(MSA\), California Counties](#), Employment Development Division, August 16, 2019. Data for Metropolitan Statistical Areas do not always track exactly to the county geography.

²⁵ [Selected Economic Characteristics, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates](#) Tulare County, California, American FactFinder, U.S. Census Bureau.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ [Median Sold Price of Existing Single Family Homes](#), California Association of Realtors, July 2019.

²⁸ [Active Listings of Existing Single Family Homes](#), California Association of Realtors, July 2019.

²⁹ Median cost of a home is \$50,000. [California Housing Affordability Update: Traditional Housing Affordability Index Q-1 2019](#), California Association of Realtors. Accessed on July 1, 2019.

³⁰ [Family Budget Fact Sheets, Tulare County](#), Economic Policy Institute.

³¹ [Tulare County's Housing Emergency Update](#), California Housing Partnership, May 2019.

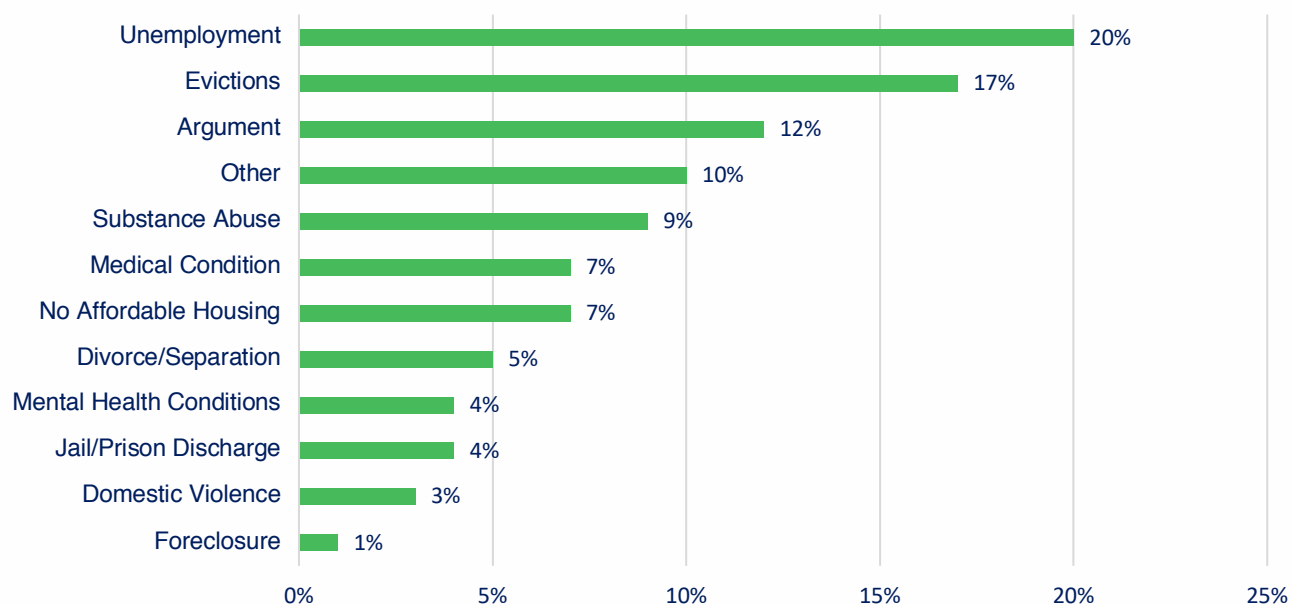
The availability of affordable housing in the area has failed dramatically to meet the needs. Little housing for very low-income and low-income families has come on the market in recent years, with relatively few affordable homes in development.³² Reports indicate that there is little inventory for first-time home buyers (the percent of first-time home buyers in 2018 was 33%, significantly lower than the historical norm of 40%).³³

Causes of Homelessness

Homelessness is impacting a tremendous number of Tulare County residents, from single adults and families to veterans and youth. The causes of homelessness in Tulare County are equally diverse, from medical emergencies to domestic violence and divorce. However, the primary causes of homelessness are loss of employment and evictions. In fact, in 2019, more than 1-in-3 people experiencing homelessness in the county reported unemployment or eviction as the cause of homelessness.

Comparing 2015 to 2019, housing-related issues are increasing as the reason for why Tulare County residents experience homelessness. In 2015, 1 in 6 people experiencing homelessness indicated housing-related issues as their reason for homelessness (evictions, no affordable housing, foreclosure and/or substandard housing). Fewer than 5 years later, nearly 1 in 4 identified housing-related issues (eviction, foreclosure, sub-standard housing, or no affordable housing) as the reason for homelessness.

2019 Causes of Homelessness



³² [Final Regional Housing Needs Plan for Tulare County](#), 2014-2023, Tulare County Association of Governments (TCAG), May 2014.

³³ [Tulare County bucks national home-buying trends: Schools remain most important](#), USA Today, November 3, 2018.

IV. TULARE COUNTY'S HOMELESS RESPONSE SYSTEM: THE OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Overview



Tulare County has a tremendous system of passionate, impactful providers dedicated to addressing homelessness. While resources specific to homelessness are limited, they are being targeted to the people who most need them, with programs that are using the best available approaches and a system that works hard to connect people as quickly as possible.



In recent years, the Kings/Tulare Homeless Alliance, Tulare County Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA), and local homeless service providers have successfully secured new state and federal funding, and are targeting this funding toward effective, proven strategies to support families and individuals exit homelessness. Without these extraordinary efforts, the impacts of homelessness on the Tulare County community would be much worse.



At the same time, the region continues to struggle with some of the highest rates of people becoming homeless for the first time, people returning to homelessness from permanent housing, and people living without shelter, as compared with comparably sized Continuums of Care in California. The fact is, the community in Tulare County does not have nearly enough services available to meet the growing need.



Looking ahead to 2025, the Tulare community has the opportunity to build on this strong foundation in a long-lasting way. With an effort focused around key areas – leadership and coordination, permanent solutions, connecting people to the system (including special subpopulations), and homelessness prevention – the community will be well positioned to enhance and improve the current system and anticipate and address the challenges ahead. This section provides an overview of the current system and the challenges that must be addressed in order to meaningfully impact homelessness in Tulare County.



Leadership & Coordination

Homelessness is a community-wide challenge that requires partnership between numerous jurisdictions, agencies, and sectors. Communities that are making headway in addressing homelessness have invested in effective, centralized leadership to coordinate efforts and implement shared strategies, ensuring that community resources are being used as effectively as possible. While the Tulare community has established a strong foundation for coordinated partnerships between providers through the Continuum of Care, greater investment and collaboration is needed by jurisdictional and system-level stakeholders to collectively achieve shared goals.

Collective Impact is an established approach for solving complex regional challenges – such as homelessness – across multiple partners, sectors and systems. To succeed, this approach requires:

- ✓ *A common agenda and coordinated plan of action to achieve shared objectives and strategies*
- ✓ *Continuous communication, including developing trust and a common vocabulary*
- ✓ *Shared measurement systems for monitoring impact*
- ✓ *A “backbone” person to plan, manage, and support the initiative, supporting stakeholders to work together with a sense of focus and urgency*

Successful strategic plan implementation requires community-wide engagement, including established systems of accountability and regular public messaging and communication between all partners. Investment in centralized, backbone staffing is crucial to coordinate key stakeholders in working together, tracking successes and addressing challenges, and ensuring the public is engaged and informed about homelessness and local solutions.

Current System

In Tulare County, the Kings/Tulare Homeless Alliance (KTHA) and the Tulare Countywide Task Force on Homelessness provide centralized countywide leadership and coordination, while the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), Every Door Open Coordinated Entry System, and United Way of Tulare County 2-1-1 Hotline provide infrastructure to distribute resources and monitor programs and outcomes between multiple partners.

The Tulare Countywide Task Force on Homelessness was launched in 2017 to coordinate the countywide homelessness response. Representatives from city jurisdictions, county agencies, nonprofit providers, the faith community, and other partners meet monthly to align the work being done to address homelessness. As a cross-system entity, the Task Force is well-positioned to guide countywide coordination around shared strategies. The Task Force commissioned this Strategic Plan to establish a roadmap for moving forward and strengthening community-wide impact on homelessness.

Task Force Membership



The Kings/Tulare Homeless Alliance (KTHA) leads the homelessness Continuum of Care (CoC) for both Tulare and Kings Counties. In this role, KTHA applies for important sources of federal and state funding and works closely with direct service providers to build strong, coordinated programs to address homelessness. KTHA also manages countywide systems, such as Coordinated Entry, to strengthen the community's homelessness response.

- ✓ *Coordinates monthly CoC meetings, including training and support for service providers to maximize impact.*
- ✓ *Coordinates several community-wide initiatives, such as Coordinated Entry, the Case Managers Roundtables, Project Homeless Connect, and the annual Point in Time Count.*
- ✓ *Manages the annual HUD Continuum of Care application process, successfully growing Kings/Tulare Counties annual federal CoC funding to \$2,354,941 – a 285% increase since 2012.*
- ✓ *Manages the Landlord Mitigation Fund and the Housing Flex Fund.*
- ✓ *Coordinates the Local Initiatives Navigation Centers in both Visalia and Tulare.*

System Infrastructure

The Kings/Tulare **Every Door Open Coordinated Entry System** was launched in 2015 to ensure the limited homelessness resources available are used as efficiently as possible for the

people most in need. Coordinated Entry provides a centralized approach to connect the region's most vulnerable homeless residents to housing through a single community-wide assessment tool and program matching system.

- ✓ *In the four years from mid-2015 to June 30, 2019, Every Door Open provided 1,637 assessments to Tulare County households experiencing homelessness.*
- ✓ *During the same time period, Every Door Open enrolled over 150 Tulare County households to permanent housing, including 77 in PSH and over 60 in RRH.*
- ✓ *Through monthly Case Manager Roundtable meetings, Every Door Open coordinates outreach, service matching, and eligibility documentation to expedite the use of available resources.*

United Way of Tulare County 2-1-1 is a centralized non-emergency phone number and website that connects thousands of community members each year to a wealth of services and resources related to housing, health, behavioral health, income, legal issues, education and other needs.

- ✓ *Refers people to the Every Door Open Coordinated Entry System (550 referrals in 2018), ensuring access for people in need who might not connect to the system in other ways.*
- ✓ *Connects households at risk of homelessness to resources that prevent them from becoming homeless and help them stay housed.*
- ✓ *In 2018, 2-1-1 received 472 calls regarding At Risk/Homeless Housing Related Assistance Programs (an increase from 65 calls in 2017), 184 calls about Homeless Permanent Supportive Housing, 734 calls about homeless shelter, 137 calls about rental assistance, and 1,404 calls about low-income/subsidized housing.*

The Kings/Tulare County **Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)** is a centralized database for tracking service delivery and impact, operated by Kings United Way. Through the HMIS, the community monitors the performance of individual programs and the overall system for continued improvement. The data collected through HMIS helps ensure the Tulare community understands the homeless population and can tailor its services to meet those needs. HMIS also supports coordinated service provision for individuals that may move frequently and are often difficult to track. The HMIS meets state and federal requirements, ensuring competitiveness for funding.

- ✓ *The HMIS is used by 21 agencies to track hundreds of PSH, RRH, transitional housing, and emergency shelter beds in Kings and Tulare Counties. Since upgrading to a new software in 2008 the HMIS's effectiveness has continued to expand.*
- ✓ *The HMIS held the data for 3,194 individuals experiencing homelessness in Tulare County in 2018, an increase from 2,951 in 2017.*
- ✓ *The HMIS generates annual "System Performance Measures," that track progress and challenges in addressing homelessness, including housing stability of formerly homeless households and the number of people in the community falling into homelessness for the first time.*

Challenges

Lack of county-wide consensus around solutions and next steps to addressing homelessness.

Tulare County has made significant strides in community-wide collaboration since the 2011 “Connecting the Dots” strategic plan. However, more is needed to coordinate resources, align the homeless response across jurisdictions, and further break down siloes that impair communication and collaboration.

- ✓ *Tulare County lacks a shared set of strategies agreed to by all stakeholders countywide. As a result, people and agencies that should be working together are working in isolation, which causes duplication. The lack of coordination also spreads resources thinly across solutions that are not always the most effective in addressing homelessness, rather than focusing resources on the most impactful next steps.*
- ✓ *The lack of funding for dedicated full-time staffing to support county-wide coordination means that the community is missing out on opportunities for partnership and increasing overall resources.*

Public misunderstandings about homelessness and the most impactful solutions.

Homelessness is growing across the state of California, and there are many myths and misconceptions around why people are homeless and the programs and services that work best in solving the problem. Rising costs of housing, combined with wages that are not keeping pace, are driving rising rates of homelessness in Tulare County and across the state. A deeper understanding of homelessness and its solutions will strengthen community support for critical next steps.

- ✓ *The most common causes of homelessness in Tulare County are unemployment and eviction.³⁴ While many people experiencing homelessness have a disability that is a barrier to regaining stable housing, this disability is often the result of their homelessness rather than its cause. Only 13% of people experiencing homelessness became homeless because of mental health issues or substance use disorder.*
- ✓ *The vast majority – at least 90% – of people experiencing homelessness in Tulare County had their last stable residence in Tulare County.*
- ✓ *There are several programs and services in Tulare County that are extremely effective in addressing homelessness – the problem is, there is not nearly enough of these programs and services to meet the need.*

³⁴ 37% of people experiencing homelessness reported becoming homeless because of eviction or unemployment in the 2019 PIT Count.

Permanent Housing Solutions



Permanent housing programs, such as Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) and Rapid Rehousing (RRH), are well-established as some of the most cost-effective and successful strategies to address homelessness.



These programs provide subsidized housing, combined with the supportive services the household needs to retain that housing and attain long-term stability. Services can include case management, connections to employment and public benefits, and medical, mental health, and substance use treatment. The programs tailor services to the unique needs of each household and successfully support many Tulare County residents each year to permanently exit homelessness and regain self-sufficiency.

Housing First

Most PSH and RRH programs in Tulare County have adopted a **Housing First/Low Barrier** approach. Housing First is a well-accepted national best practice that eliminates barriers to housing, ensuring individuals and families can exit homelessness as quickly as possible. Under a Housing First approach, people experiencing homelessness are supported in returning to housing as quickly as possible, often through supportive housing programs that have no pre-requisites, preconditions, or program participation requirements. Housing First does not mean “no rules,” but it does mean no unnecessary rules that could prevent people from entering the program.

The Housing First approach has been extremely successful in reducing the length of time households are homeless, preventing returns to homelessness, and supporting participants’ long-term stability and well-being. Research suggests Housing First program participants are 2.5 times more likely to be housed after 18-24 months than other programs.³⁵

Multiple studies show that Housing First significantly reduces the costs of homelessness on communities, for example:

- A study of 700 veterans across 14 medical centers showed a 32% reduction in VA health care costs for those receiving a Housing First intervention, with intensive inpatient costs down by 54%.³⁶

³⁵ Baxter AJ, Tweed EJ, Katikireddi SV, et al. [Effects of Housing First approaches on health and well-being of adults who are homeless or at risk of homelessness: systematic review and meta-analysis of randomised controlled trials](#). J Epidemiol Community Health 2019; 73.

³⁶ Montgomery, Ann Elizabeth, Lindsay Hill, Dennis P. Culhane, Vincent Kane. U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs, Housing First Implementation Brief, August 2014. Available at <https://www.va.gov/homeless/nchav/docs/Housing-First-Implementation-brief.pdf>. Further program information and links to publications available at <https://www.va.gov/homeless/nchav/models/housing-first.asp>. Sites included Bay Pines (FL), Bedford/Boston, Chicago, Dallas, Denver, Detroit, Los Angeles, New Orleans, New York City, Philadelphia, Portland, San Francisco, Syracuse, and Washington, DC.

- The City of Albuquerque saw a 64% reduction in jail costs and 84% reduction in costs for in-patient medical and mental health visits after one year of using a Housing First approach.³⁷
- Another study found that providing a Housing First intervention saved the system \$2,449 per person per month.³⁸

In Tulare County, 81 households have entered Housing First Permanent Supportive Housing from 2017 to mid-2019. Year-over-year, approximately 95% continue to remain stably housed. While the exact cost savings has not been calculated specifically for Tulare County, the community's PSH programs have likely saved tens of thousands of dollars in first responder and emergency service costs.

The Current System

PSH and RRH Programs

The Tulare County region has a variety of PSH and RRH programs, funded through several sources including Continuum of Care, Emergency Solutions Grant, CalWORKS, HUD's Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH), Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF), Housing Authority program vouchers, and the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA). The primary source of funding used for PSH and RRH in Tulare County is from the HUD Continuum of Care program; in the 2018 competition, the CoC won \$1,960,095, for PSH and RRH across Kings and Tulare Counties.

Increasing these resources has also increased the number of people moving from homelessness to permanent housing. While 52 people exited street outreach to permanent housing in 2016-17, that number doubled in 2017-18 to 105, increasing the percent of people who are working with street outreach staff and have successful outcomes from 45% to 62%.

Permanent Supportive Housing provides long-term housing with intensive supportive services to persons with disabilities. These programs typically target people with extensive experiences of homelessness and multiple vulnerabilities and needs who would not be able to retain housing without significant support.

Rapid Rehousing provides housing subsidies and tailored supportive services for up to 24-months, with the goal of helping people to transition during that time period to more permanent housing. RRH is funded primarily through CoC and ESG programs, TulareWORKS, and Supportive Services for Veteran Families.

³⁷ Paul Guerin, Anne Minssen, City of Albuquerque Heading Home Initiative Cost Study Report Phase 1, Institute for Social Research, May 2016. Available at <http://isr.unm.edu/reports/2013/city-of-abq-heading-home-initiative-cost-study-phase-1.pdf>

³⁸ M. Larimer, D. Malone, M. Garner, et al. "Health Care and Public Service Use and Costs Before and After Provision of Housing for Chronically Homeless Persons with Severe Alcohol Problems." *Journal of the American Medical Association*, April 1, 2009.



Rapid Rehousing

- ✓ *Tulare County has 104 RRH beds, operated by 3 agencies – an increase of 71 beds since 2012 (including bi-county SSVF).*
- ✓ *A total of 956 people have been assessed as needing RRH since mid-2015, with 60 households actually enrolling in an RRH program after passing eligibility requirements, compiling needed paperwork, and locating a housing unit.*



Permanent Supportive housing

- ✓ *Tulare County has 238 PSH beds operated by 6 agencies – an increase of 146 since 2012, with at least 26 additional units under development.*
- ✓ *A total of 590 people have been assessed as needing PSH since mid-2015, with 77 Tulare County households actually enrolling in a PSH program.*
- ✓ *Approximately 95% of people housed in PSH in Tulare County either remain in that unit or move to other permanent housing.*

The Moving On Initiative is a partnership with the Housing Authority of Tulare County that provides support to PSH participants who have stabilized and no longer need intensive supportive services. The program supports these households to move out of PSH, which creates vacancies in PSH for additional people currently experiencing homelessness. The Housing Authority has provided 10 vouchers to support this program, with some additional vouchers provided by Self-Help Enterprises – helping to guarantee that limited PSH resources are dedicated to the households that most need them.

Programs that Support Effective Use of PSH/RRH Resources

Tulare County has several important programs that help connect people to housing once they have been matched to a program. The programs help make sure that resources are not wasted and are being used as quickly as possible.

Permanent housing programs are most effective when they are combined with:

1. Services that address barriers to accessing and retaining housing, including flexible housing funds, landlord engagement, and housing navigation;
2. Intensive supportive services after entering housing – especially for people with extremely high needs; and
3. A low-barrier Housing First approach.

Housing Navigators help people experiencing homelessness find apartments and housing that can be financially supported through various programs. The assistance increases housing stability for those in supportive housing and ensures that programs can be accessed despite barriers. KTHA employs two full-time housing navigators to help people experiencing homelessness with tasks such as locating vacancies, compiling mandatory eligibility documentation, developing landlord relationships, and lease negotiations.

The Tulare County Landlord Risk Mitigation Fund provides flexible funds that encourage landlords to rent to people exiting homelessness by providing incentives such as extra security deposits. The Risk Mitigation fund is intended to address landlord concerns about renting to households that may have past evictions, poor credit, or criminal histories that are keeping them from obtaining housing. The project was established in November 2018 with over \$100,000 available to landlords.

The Flexible Housing Fund, launched in July 2019, supports individuals and families to exit homelessness more quickly by providing one-time resources that help households overcome financial barriers to housing. This may include financial assistance to cover one-time security deposits, money to reverse utility arrearages or to pay utility deposits, coverage of moving expenses, or other assistance. A special partnership recently launched with Anthem Blue Cross provides flexible housing resources for Anthem members who have been matched to a Housing Authority Mainstream Voucher Program (MVP) voucher, increasing the overall resources available to the Flexible Housing Fund.

Landlord Engagement

Many communities – even those in high cost rental markets – are highly successful in working with landlords and property managers to identify units for people exiting homelessness. Building relationships, including understanding and addressing landlords' concerns, is key.

Several landlord engagement strategies have proven especially effective in engaging landlords and property managers as partners in addressing homelessness:

- ✓ **Access Through Outreach:** Develop a message and ensure it reaches landlords and property managers. Get the word out about the program in landlord and business association publications and at meetings and gatherings. Engage participating landlords to tell their stories of success with the program to their peers.
- ✓ **Develop Messaging:** While there are many advantages to participating in a housing program, landlords often have anxiety and concerns about renting to people who were recently homeless. Develop materials that help explain the advantages and the approaches the program takes to ensure the landlord's property will be respected, the client will be supported, and rent will be paid.
- ✓ **Address Barriers for Individual Tenants:** Create a portfolio for the client, including letters of support from community members who know the client or information about the client's background and the steps they have taken. Help with criminal record expungement and credit repair. Provide opportunities for the potential tenants to meet landlords one-on-one to create a personal connection.
- ✓ **Landlord Risk Mitigation:** Ensure landlords have somebody they can call if they have concerns and explain the risk mitigation fund that provides compensation if issues arise. When a client is not a good fit for a unit, programs should move quickly to prevent the need for an eviction proceeding.
- ✓ **Build Lasting Relationships with Landlords Over Time:** Support the landlord to have a positive experience with clients and continue building the relationship between the landlord and program over time. Landlords often appreciate the ability to fill vacant units quickly without the cost of advertising and having guaranteed monthly rent.

Challenges

There are far too few PSH and RRH resources to meet the need.

While the Tulare County community is accomplishing a great deal with limited funds, the available supportive housing resources are insufficient to meet the need. In 2018, for example, an average of 23.3 new households were assessed as needing either RRH or PSH each month (approximately 280 total households in 2018). At the same time, because of the scarcity in PSH and RRH resources, only 6 households were enrolled in PSH or RRH each month on average.

- ✓ *The community needs more housing resources, faster. For example, while the number of people identified as chronically homeless at a single point in time has increased by 36% from 2016 to 2019 (180 to 244 people, respectively), the number of total PSH beds only increased by 7% (from 223 to 238 beds) during the same timeframe.*
- ✓ *Many opportunities exist in Tulare County to realign resources to more effectively address homelessness by focusing on solutions rather than treating symptoms and by coordinating resources between different partners. One example is using Medi-Cal to provide supportive services whenever possible.*

Assessments and Interventions: First Six Months 2019 (Jan – June)

	Identified as Needing PSH	Number PSH Enrollments	Identified as Needing RRH	Number RRH Enrollments	Number of HDAP Enrollments	Number of MVP Enrollments
Single Adults	47	7	75	7	2	3
Families	55	6	33	5	0	0
Total Households	102	13	108	12	2	3

Even when PSH and RRH resources are available, it can be challenging to find units for program participants to rent.

Tulare County has a shortage of affordable housing, especially for single adults who have extremely low incomes. And while there are often vouchers available – through the Housing Authority or Continuum of Care PSH or RRH programs, for example – those vouchers often sit unused because of difficulty locating a unit that will accept the program’s participant as a renter.

Housing resources could be used more quickly to end homelessness for more households if it was easier to find housing. On average, it takes a household over 65 days to locate and move into housing after enrollment in a RRH or PSH program in Tulare County.

Landlords are invaluable partners in helping people exit homelessness and get back on their feet. PSH and RRH-type programs can actually benefit participating landlords, due to the reliable source of rent and the support of the program in locating new tenants when needed. Yet landlords are often reluctant to rent to people who were recently homeless or who have bad credit, histories of past evictions, or other challenges. Landlord engagement initiatives have had meaningful success in other communities, for example by connecting landlords to others who have had positive experiences with the program and introducing them to prospective renters and people experiencing homelessness to hear their stories.

- ✓ *The Tulare County community does not have a coordinated landlord engagement or targeted messaging campaign to educate landlords about the benefits of participating in*

these programs. Resources and staffing are needed to lead a community-wide landlord engagement program or marketing campaign.

- ✓ *Both the Landlord Mitigation and Flexible Housing Funds are extremely valuable programs in helping to get people connected to units faster. However, these pilot programs are new to Tulare County and have minimal resources to support infrastructure or staffing for administration of the program and will need continued investment over time. Contributing to these funds is a meaningful way the public can support ending homelessness for additional Tulare County households.*
- ✓ *The pace of affordable housing development dedicated to people who are extremely low-income or in Permanent Supportive Housing is not nearly enough to keep up with the need. Most Tulare County new development is higher-end housing that is out of reach to many residents. A 5-year permanent supportive housing development pipeline would ensure important steps are being taken to increase available units over time.*

Connecting People to Housing-Focused Services

Many people experiencing homelessness in Tulare County have been homeless for an extended period of time. These individuals are often disconnected from the resources they need to exit homelessness and achieve stability. Supporting people with extensive histories of homelessness and related trauma requires significant outreach and engagement.

In recent years, community partners have been assertive in applying for grants and taking advantage of opportunities to increase the resources and programs that support people who are living outside. These programs include street/encampment outreach, emergency shelters and warming centers, and “one-stop” programs where people can access many different services in a single location. Each of these programs provides housing-focused assistance that helps people use the resources available to them to exit homelessness as quickly as possible.

While long-term solutions to homelessness require community-wide investment in permanent solutions – especially supportive housing – housing-focused services help people connect to these long-term solutions and address the barriers that keep them from becoming housed. The goal is to help people exit homelessness as soon as possible. Once housed, people can work on the underlying challenges that undermine their stability.

Housing Focused Case Management

Case management is a crucial supportive service for people experiencing, exiting, and at risk of homelessness. For people who are currently homeless, Housing Focused Case Management is a best practice that focuses on the specific challenges and barriers keeping the family or individual from regaining housing. While people experiencing homelessness often have complex needs, these are generally more effectively addressed after they are housed.

Clients and case managers work together to develop and implement a dynamic “Housing Stability Plan” that is revised and refined over time. The process includes:

- ✓ **Assessing Barriers to Housing** – What are the specific barriers preventing this household from getting into permanent housing *right now*? What strengths and resources does the client have? Strengths can include, for example, a family or faith network, work experience, a powerful story, strong survival skills, etc.
- ✓ **Goal Setting & Action Planning** – What are the client’s housing goals and what steps will they take to achieve those goals? Using client-centered approaches that emphasize client choice, the case manager and client work together to develop a plan. The plan defines the role of the client and the role of the case manager, and the bite-sized steps each will take between frequent meetings.
- ✓ **Support Long-Term Housing Stability** – Housing-focused case management continues after the client has entered housing, to ensure they remain for the long-term. Case managers assist during move in, for example by helping the client to meet new neighbors. Some households need extensive support to address the underlying causes of their homelessness and attain stability over time, including, for example:
 - Treatment to address physical, mental or behavioral (e.g., substance use) issues
 - Job training and workforce development
 - Tenant education and support to ensure lease compliance
- ✓ **Best Practice Techniques** such as Motivational Interviewing and Trauma Informed Care are key to client engagement and participation in voluntary services.

The Current System

Street and Encampment Outreach

Street and Encampment Outreach Teams meet people where they are to provide connections to services. Many people with extensive histories of homelessness are disconnected from the network of services that could help them return to housing. They often have deep-seated trauma and negative experiences with the safety net system that may make them reluctant to engage with providers.

When outreach workers go to where people are living, they can build trust, better understand the circumstances that people are facing, and offer advice and support in a more meaningful and relevant way, which can provide a better chance for people to move to more supportive environments. Outreach specialists use proven engagement techniques, such as Trauma Informed Care, Critical Time Intervention, and Motivational Interviewing, to build relationships of trust and help people connect to the services and support they need to find and keep housing.

Call Out:

Many of the people who are unsheltered in Tulare County have been homeless for a long time – over 49% in 2019 were homeless at least a year and many others have been homeless for decades. These individuals often need significant time to build relationships with outreach staff before they are ready to move on to housing. While most people do not want to live outside, their years of trauma often make it difficult for them to keep appointments or engage with services without intensive support.

49% of
people
homeless 1+
years
(adults)



11% of people
homeless at
least 4 times in
past 3 years
(adults)



Street Outreach programs in Tulare County include **Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH)**, the City of Visalia's multi-disciplinary **Homeless Outreach and Proactive Enforcement (HOPE) Team** comprised of the City of Visalia police officers partnered with a County mental health professional, and **Visalia Outreach Case Management** that provides an outreach worker to provide case management in the City of Visalia. Together these agencies and organizations partner to identify individuals experiencing homelessness and connect them to Coordinated Entry and other services.

- ✓ Street outreach programs served a total of 153 people in the first half of 2019.
- ✓ The number of people who exited to permanent housing from street outreach programs doubled from 2016-17 to 2017-18, from 52 people to 105.

Emergency Shelters and Warming Centers

Emergency shelters and warming centers provide safe places for people to stay at night and help connect people to services and the Coordinated Entry System. When the programs are housing-focused and low-barrier, they are an important part of the system to engage people and help them exit homelessness to permanent housing.

Best Practice: Housing-Focused Crisis Shelters

Housing-focused crisis shelters (sometimes also called “emergency shelters”) are an important part of a community’s response to homelessness. While they help people stay safe from the dangers of living outside, they are also a valuable link to permanent housing, especially for people who have been homeless for an extended period of time and might be reluctant to engage in services.

The most effective shelters are “housing focused,” meaning that they are low-barrier and tailor their services to support the household with the goal of exiting homelessness. These programs do not require participation in services as a condition of stay, but instead offer voluntary case management that assists households to create an action plan to get housing.

To be most effective, a housing-focused crisis shelter should have:

- **Admission policies that screen-in** rather than screen-out potential participants with the greatest barriers to housing;
- **Minimal rules and restrictions** that focus on behavioral expectations to help ensure client and staff safety – few rules, not “no rules”;
- **Case management and other services** that help connect people to housing, including Coordinated Entry System assessments;
- **Accommodations** that welcome partners, pets, and possessions so that people do not face separation;
- **Flexible access to shelter and services**, including extended hours of operation, arrangements for late arrivals, non-restricted mealtimes, and lenient curfew policies.

Emergency Shelters provide 138 beds for homeless single adults and families across Tulare County in Dinuba, Porterville, Tulare, and Visalia. They include meals, showers, and connections to the Coordinated Entry System and other services. Two **Domestic Violence Shelters** – one in Porterville and one in Visalia – provide an additional 39 emergency shelter beds to survivors of domestic violence and their children. The City of Porterville partnered with Turning Point to establish a **Navigation Center**, a low-barrier, housing-focused shelter that will provide comprehensive onsite services to support participants in exiting homelessness permanently.

St. Paul Episcopal Church’s Warming Center provides a place for people experiencing homelessness to sleep during winter. The Warming Center intentionally removes barriers to entry by providing kennels for people with dogs, requiring no service participation, and offering

space for people to store their personal belongings. While people stay at the center, they have access to public health nurses, mental health crisis workers, Adult Protective Services, and substance use treatment services.

- ✓ In 2018-19 season, the Warming Center served as many as 125 individuals in one night, with an average of 105 people per night in February 2019.
- ✓ The Warming Center connected 502 people to the Coordinated Entry System and HMIS – approximately 50% of these individuals were new to the system.³⁹

Drop-In Multi-Service Programs

Drop-In (or “One Stop”) Programs bring together multiple service providers at a single location. By providing immediate access to several different services onsite, these drop-in programs build relationships between service providers and people experiencing homelessness and connect them to the services they need to exit homelessness.

Local Initiatives Navigation Centers (LINC) are drop-in programs that take place weekly in Visalia and bi-monthly in Tulare City, to connect individuals to public benefits, assistance for Veterans and families, documentation and identification cards, substance use treatment, access to the Coordinated Entry System, and other services.

- ✓ Started in Visalia in April 2018 with an additional site in Tulare initiated in March 2019.
- ✓ Served 93 people as of June 2019 – 27 people received Coordinated Entry assessments and 58 people were helped to complete their program eligibility documentation, which helped them to obtain housing more quickly.

The Dream Center for Transitional Age Youth (TAY), launched in 2019 by the Tulare County Office of Education (TCOE), provides a one-stop navigation center for youth. In addition to TCOE resources, the center includes staff from Tulare County Child Abuse Prevention Council, TulareWORKs, and Tulare County Child Welfare Services who connect participants to benefits, family connections, the Independent Living Program, and other resources.

Annual Project Homeless Connect events, coordinated by Kings/Tulare Homeless Alliance, bring together a variety of community members and services each January in the cities of Porterville, Tulare, and Visalia. Participants receive a wide variety of services, including public benefits advocacy, behavioral health care, employment services, HIV testing, meals, veteran services, and substance use treatment.

Challenges

Tulare County has a large number of people experiencing long-term homelessness who require intensive engagement and support.

³⁹ Reverend Suzy Ward, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Meeting Minutes, Tulare Countywide Task Force on Homelessness, April 17, 2019.

Ending homelessness for individuals and families who have long been homeless often requires frequent and repeated engagement over time. With only a few outreach resources available for the many hundreds of people experiencing chronic, long-time, unsheltered homelessness in the current system, most people are not getting connected to services and support. Furthermore, those drop-in centers that do exist are only open a few days per month and are not distributed evenly across the county.

- ✓ *244 people identified in the 2019 Point in Time Count were chronically homeless – 30% of the total count. Yet, people experiencing chronic homelessness comprise only 14.4% of people in the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) – indicating that many households with very high needs are not engaged with the homeless system of care.*
- ✓ *People experiencing unsheltered homelessness in Tulare County have extremely high needs. More than 85% have a disabling condition, 45% have a mental illness, and 19% are older adults, at least 55+ years old. Fifty-nine percent of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness have been homeless for at least a year.*
- ✓ *Existing outreach teams are dramatically understaffed. Successful outreach often requires multiple contacts before there is enough trust to move forward with other services. The city of Visalia's HOPE Team has found that the average contact with unsheltered individuals is 45 minutes. Their experience is that at initial contact, services are refused 9 out of 10 times, even when people later end up engaging with the HOPE team and accepting services after trust is established.⁴⁰*

Tulare County currently has no low-barrier shelter options anywhere in the county and there are not nearly enough shelter beds to meet the need.

- ✓ *Only 50 of the community's 177 year-round shelter beds are dedicated to serving single males, despite men making up the vast majority of the county's homeless population.*
- ✓ *None of the shelters were operating at full capacity at the time of the 2019 Point in Time Count. The average shelter utilization for 2018 was 85%, with 15% of available beds left vacant. Yet, in 2018, 519 people were experiencing unsheltered homelessness on any given night.*
- ✓ *While the St. Paul's Warming Center was low-barrier and successful in engaging people who had not previously connected to the system, the Warming Center only operates from December to February and is not fully funded.*

⁴⁰ Regular Meeting, Agenda & Minutes, Visalia City Council, October 1, 2018. Available at <http://www.visalia.city/sirepub/mtgviewer.aspx?meetid=645&doctype=MINUTES>

Comprehensive Supportive Services and Temporary Housing

The majority of adults experiencing homelessness in Tulare County – 71% – have a disability or significant impairment, including chronic physical impairments, mental illness, substance use disorder, or combinations of multiple conditions. While many were disabled prior to losing their housing, many others acquired their disability as a result of living on the streets or without stable housing – an experience that is extremely dangerous and traumatic.

To return to housing successfully and for the long-term, people experiencing homelessness often require ongoing treatment and support – both before and after they are housed.

The Current System

Supportive Services for Health and Wellness

Nonprofits, community groups, and county agencies provide a variety of services that can help people to exit homelessness and stay housed for the long-term. Programs such as mental health treatment, employment and job training, health care, and substance use recovery can meaningfully help people attain greater stability.

While some of these programs are dedicated to people experiencing homelessness, others are resources available to everyone in the community. Ensuring that these programs are available and accessible for people experiencing homelessness allows the community to get the most out of its existing resources.

Mental Health treatment is available to Tulare County residents through programs funded with Medi-Cal and state Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) resources. Treatment may include individual, group or family therapy, psychiatric evaluation and consultation, crisis emergency assistance and services coordination. Tulare County HHSA provides clinic-based integrated mental health services to individuals with a serious mental illness. They also provide mobile mental health services, which connects with and offers treatment options to people who have been unable to access other existing services. Additionally, Tulare County HHSA staffs three one-stop centers that provide mental health and other services to youth ages 12 through 24.

- ✓ *The HHSA Mental Health Department fast tracks HOPE Team clients to increase accessibility of clinical mental health programs for people experiencing homelessness.*
- ✓ *The Transitional Living Center (TLC), a 53-bed augmented board and care residential facility, provides food, shelter and other basic needs alongside individual and group therapy, and other mental health supportive services.*
- ✓ *The County's Full Services Partnership Program (FSP) is available to people who experience frequent hospitalizations or incarceration, as well as those who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness due to a mental health disorder. The FSP program provides basic needs and other support services, and also helps people with housing.*

Alcohol and Other Drug treatment is provided through HHSA and a variety of service providers, including residential and outpatient treatment for people with substance use disorders. For example:

- ✓ *HHSA, Kaweah Delta and various other programs offer substance use treatment and dual-diagnosis outpatient services for those with substance abuse and mental health issues at several sites across Tulare County.*
- ✓ *HHSA has detox beds available for individuals who are suffering from alcohol or substance use issues while they wait placement in other programs.*

Medical Services are available to people experiencing homelessness through HHSA's Public Health Branch, hospitals and other clinical partners.

- ✓ *The HHSA Public Health Branch coordinates with other programs and agencies to conduct outreach, for example, providing infectious disease prevention services at encampments along the St. Johns River.*
- ✓ *Kaweah Medical Bridge Project offers supportive services for people at risk of or experiencing homelessness based on service needs. Six staff provide connections to medical services, Medi-Cal and other public benefits. The Kaweah team receives 1,200 referrals a year and works closely with County agencies, the Coordinated Entry System Housing Navigators, and the HOPE team.*
- ✓ *A new Street Medicine initiative connects doctors to people living on the streets and in encampments. Street Medicine, also known as "Backpack Medicine," is an important way to engage people who are not otherwise connected to the system.*

Connection to Income and Benefits

Public Benefits Enrollment support is provided by HHSA and nonprofit agencies to access programs such as CalFresh, TulareWORKS, Medi-Cal, Medicare, General Assistance, SSI and SSDI. These resources help people exit homelessness or retain their housing by providing cash assistance, access to medical and behavioral health services, job training, and support with transportation and child care.

- ✓ *The SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access and Recovery (SOAR) program increases access to Social Security disability benefits, which provides long-term income that can help pay rent and cover other household expenses. All CoC-funded programs working with people experiencing homelessness are trained in SOAR.*

Workforce Development services are offered by the County and nonprofit providers, including education, job training and placement services to ensure people have a pathway to jobs. For example:

- ✓ *Community Services Employment Training (CSET) offers workforce development and training programs at one-stop locations in Visalia, Porterville, Tulare and Dinuba.*

- ✓ *TulareWORKs provides job skills training, work experience, subsidized employment and job search assistance throughout the county.*
- ✓ *In 2018, the City of Visalia, in collaboration with the Workforce Investment Board, launched the Environmental Cleanup Project (ECO) to provide a 12-week transitional job program for individuals who are homeless.*

Temporary Housing to Support Specialized Assistance.

Transitional Housing provides temporary housing accommodations and supportive services. While many households benefit most from direct connections to permanent housing programs such as RRH or PSH (which are often more cost-effective over the long term), transitional housing can also be an effective support. In particular, certain subpopulations, such as people fleeing domestic violence and transitional age youth, can meaningfully benefit from a transitional housing environment.

- ✓ *212 people participated in a Transitional Housing program in 2018. 45% of transitional housing participants who exited transitional housing in 2018 moved into permanent housing.*
- ✓ *Tulare County has 133 year-round Transitional Housing beds, with 48 additional beds for people fleeing domestic violence, operated by Family Services of Tulare County and Central California Family Crisis Center.*
- ✓ *Crossroads Transitional Housing for Youth, run by Uplift Family Services, has two 10-bed transitional housing sites (one in Porterville and one in Visalia) for youth aged 18 to 25 years old.*

Bridge Housing offers temporary housing, typically for people who have been matched with a permanent housing opportunity such as PSH or RRH and are looking for a unit to rent. The program supports people to stay connected with their housing navigators and other service providers to make sure the permanent housing resource is able to be used as quickly as possible. While no Bridge Housing is currently available, a new program (Eden House) is under development that will provide 22 Bridge Housing beds for Visalia and Tulare City residents for a limited time while they seek housing.

Permanent Housing



Permanent Supportive Housing

Provides long-term housing with intensive supportive services to persons with disabilities.



Rapid Rehousing

Provides housing subsidies and supportive services for up to 24 months, with the goal of helping people to transition to self-sufficiency and retain their housing unit independently.

Temporary Housing



Transitional Housing

Provides temporary housing accommodations and supportive services for up to 24 months, with the goal of the participant moving on to permanent housing after the program concludes.



Bridge Housing

Offers temporary housing, typically for people who have been matched with a permanent housing opportunity such as PSH or RRH and are looking for a unit to rent.



Emergency Shelter

Provides beds for homeless single adults and families, often including meals, showers, case management support, and connections to the Coordinated Entry System and other services.

Housing Not Dedicated to People Experiencing Homelessness



Senior Housing

Provides care that meets the needs of an aging population, ranging from independent living to 24-hour care.



Board & Care

Licensed residential care facilities for people with special needs that provide intensive support and assistance with daily living.

Challenges

Resources that could help address homelessness are being underutilized.

While there are many resources in the community that could help people exit homelessness, these resources are not always accessible for people experiencing homelessness.

- ✓ *For example, while many people experiencing homelessness are eligible for public benefits, 64% of people reported in 2019 that they have no financial resources, including public benefits.*
- ✓ *When people are enrolled in Medi-Cal, SSI and other federally or state funded benefits programs, it increases the overall resources available in the community to address homelessness. Yet only 13% of PIT survey respondents were on SSI, 5% on SSDI, and 2% on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).*

Many of the resources that could be used to address homelessness are not tailored to the intensive needs of people who have been homeless for a long time.

- ✓ *Barriers, such as long wait times, make it difficult for people who are eligible for mental health and substance use disorder treatment to take advantage of the services. Programs such as county mental health services have begun taking important steps to increase access, but much more is needed to build better coordination and opportunities for warm handoffs.*
- ✓ *Sufficient staffing is a significant challenge in Tulare County, as there are not enough qualified people to meet the needs of the community; many available staff positions remain open and unfilled.*
- ✓ *While a diagnosis of a serious mental illness opens the doors for accessing robust services, it can be challenging for some individuals to work with a clinician to obtain a diagnosis.*

Transportation to services is challenging for people experiencing homelessness.

Many of the services and housing options in Tulare County are concentrated in certain parts of the county. These resources are often inaccessible for people experiencing homelessness who live outside of urban areas. The lack of affordable public transportation between urban and outlying areas is a significant barrier for low-income and people with disabilities living in Tulare County. It also restricts the viable locations for creating new housing resources for people who are low income or experiencing homelessness and who need to be near transit centers and services.

- ✓ *While the community has successfully increased one-stop drop-in sites in certain cities in Tulare County, multi-disciplinary mobile teams would be extremely valuable in reaching those in more remote locations.*

- ✓ *Service providers and outreach workers spend considerable time transporting clients to appointments, but significantly more transportation support is needed to help people get to appointments and access benefits and services.*

Preventing Homelessness Before It Starts

Living without stable housing, even briefly, is a traumatizing experience, and many never recover from the physical, emotional and financial impacts. By preventing homelessness, we can help individuals and families avoid the economic, social, mental, and physical challenges that result from homelessness – often at a much lower cost than it takes to serve people after they lose their housing.

Homelessness Diversion

Communities across the country are integrating “homelessness diversion” programs (also sometimes called “Assisted Rapid Resolution”) into their Coordinated Entry Systems. These programs provide crisis resolution support – often a combination of financial assistance and supportive services – to prevent homelessness for households who are currently housed but at imminent risk of becoming homeless.

Homelessness diversion programs provide a variety of interventions to help prevent people from becoming homeless. However, a one-size-fits-all approach is not the most effective or cost efficient. Instead, diversion programs tailor services to meet the needs, strengths, and preferences of each client, which ensures that each person receives the minimum amount of support necessary to prevent homelessness, while conserving limited resources and serving as many people as possible. The programs decrease the likelihood of a household entering an emergency shelter and are less expensive than providing assistance once a household becomes homeless.

At a minimum, effective diversion programs can:

-
- ✓ *Target people most at risk of falling into homelessness*
 - ✓ *Use problem solving conversations to support clients in using their strengths and existing resources to avoid becoming homeless*
 - ✓ *Provide support with interventions such as short-term cash assistance, landlord mediation, education on legal rights and responsibilities, credit repair and financial literacy assistance, employment assistance, conflict resolution, and referrals to mainstream resources*
 - ✓ *Reach people who may not otherwise connect with the system through relationships with schools, social services programs, and other partners*
 - ✓ *Create a network of providers trained in problem solving conversation techniques*
-

The Current System

KTHA will be launching a new **Homelessness Diversion** program as part of the Coordinated Entry System. The Coordinated Entry System Housing Navigators will assist clients at risk of homelessness to problem solve and identify alternative housing solutions. The Housing Navigators will also provide referrals to community partners that offer services and supports to low-income households in Tulare County, including those at risk of homelessness.

- ✓ *A single, centralized assessment will be rolled out in October 2019 to prioritize prevention resources for those who would most benefit.*
- ✓ *Housing Navigators will receive training on homelessness diversion best practices and work with people at risk of homelessness to identify their strengths and resources to overcome barriers to staying housed.*
- ✓ *The program will connect people to many different community programs and agencies who provide services that can help prevent homelessness, such as financial assistance and negotiation support for households with overdue utility bills, eviction prevention and tenant rights services.*

Intensive Supportive Services are available to support certain households with extremely high needs retain their housing.

- ✓ *The Housing Stabilization Pilot Program is a one-year pilot targeting people who were recently homeless and have intensive service needs. The program provides participants with clinical and supportive services to prevent them from returning to homelessness.*
- ✓ *For individuals who need significant services because their mental health diagnosis makes it difficult for them to hold a job, be able to go to school, or participate in healthy relationships, HHSA's Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) Teams provide frequent case management, sometimes daily, along with psychiatry and other supportive services.*

Challenges

With more and more Tulare County households spending more and more of their income on rent, there are an increasing number of people falling into homelessness. Once somebody has fallen into homelessness, it can be extremely difficult to return to housing.

- ✓ *The Kings/Tulare Continuum of Care had almost 30% more people who are experiencing first time homelessness in 2017-18 than other comparable CoCs in California (1,696 people in the Kings/Tulare CoC, compared with 1,325 people in comparable CoCs).⁴¹*

⁴¹ System Performance Measures Data since FY 2015, HUD Exchange, available at <https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/5691/system-performance-measures-data-since-fy-2015/>.

- ✓ *Six percent more formerly-homeless people returned to homelessness in 2017-18 after one year in Tulare County than comparable CoCs (18% returns in Tulare County, compared with 12% in other CoCs).⁴²*
- ✓ *Most prevention resources are disconnected from the homeless system, requiring development of a comprehensive network of new partners to collaborate and coordinate to be more effective at addressing prevention.*
- ✓ *Staffing for the diversion program and resources for prevention, such as limited-time subsidies, is extremely limited in Tulare County yet necessary to create a strong prevention program.*

Preventing Criminalization of Homelessness

Criminalizing homelessness is ineffective and expensive and, in some cases, illegal.⁴³ In fact, in order to receive California State No Place Like Home (NPLH) funding, communities are required to describe what actions they are taking to avoid the criminalization of homelessness.

Criminalizing homelessness includes laws that punish people for being homeless, such as bans on public camping or panhandling, or encampment eviction processes that move people from one location to another.

These kinds of approaches can be extremely expensive to communities:

- ✓ *A recent Cost Study found that Orange County spent \$23.7 million on homelessness in one year by police departments, jail/prison, and the Sheriff's Department's Homeless Liaison program.⁴⁴*
- ✓ *An evaluation of criminalization and enforcement related to homelessness in Seattle and Spokane, Washington, found that the cities spent a minimum of \$3.7 million on enforcement over a period of 5 years.⁴⁵*

Evicting people from sidewalks and alleys when they are sleeping outside does not force them to leave the region nor does it end their homelessness. Instead most people simply relocate to sleep in a different part of the community. These processes are expensive and require the use of public resources such as law enforcement to carry out the evictions – resources that would be better spent in longer-term solutions.

⁴² *Id.*

⁴³ In *Martin v. City of Boise*, No. 15-35845 (9th Cir. 2019), the 9th Circuit ruled that the Cruel and Unusual Punishments Clause of the 8th Amendment precludes enforcement of a statute prohibiting sleeping outside against homeless individuals with no access to shelter. Available at <http://cdn.ca9.uscourts.gov/datastore/opinions/2018/09/04/15-35845.pdf>

⁴⁴ Snow, David A. and Rachael E. Goldberg, *Homelessness in Orange County: The Costs to Our Community*, Orange County United Way and Jamboree, 2017. Available at <https://www.unitedwayoc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/united-way-cost-study-homelessness-2017-report.pdf>

⁴⁵ Howard, Joshua, David Tran & Sara Rankin, *At What Cost: The Minimum Cost of Criminalizing Homelessness in Seattle and Spokane*, Homeless Rights Advocacy Project, Seattle University School of Law, 2015. Available at <https://digitalcommons.law.seattleu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1000&context=hrap>

Unfortunately, once people have been forced to move to a new location in Tulare County, their service providers may no longer be able to find them, resulting in missed opportunities to connect to housing, benefits, or other resources needed to help them exit homelessness. Outreach teams, low-barrier places for people to go during the day, and supportive housing options are more effective than criminalizing homelessness, and meaningfully address the impacts of homelessness on everyone in the community.

The Current System

The Tulare County community reduces criminalization of homelessness by cross-system partnerships with law enforcement, providing training and education, and with alternative approaches to engage with people experiencing homelessness.

Partnering Law Enforcement with Mental Health. Through a partnership between the Visalia Police Department and HHSA Mental Health, a multi-disciplinary team of police officers and mental health professionals (the HOPE Team) provides outreach to people experiencing homelessness and facilitates connections to housing and supportive services. The HHSA Mental Health Branch also provides Crisis Intervention Training to law enforcement officers.

Engaging Law Enforcement Partners on the Task Force. The Tulare Countywide Task Force on Homelessness includes a dedicated seat for law enforcement participation, supporting engagement and representation of law enforcement in collaboration with other agencies serving people experiencing homelessness. Task Force agendas include presentations from the Tulare County Sheriff and other representatives of law enforcement.

Specialty Courts. Tulare County has multiple specialty courts, including a Drug & Recovery Court, Mental Health Court, and Veterans Court, serving participants including people experiencing homelessness. Through collaboration between Tulare County Superior Court, Probation, and other community partners, these courts provide alternatives to jail and connections to resources, including housing, employment, and behavioral health services.

Challenges

While Tulare County’s high rates of unsheltered homelessness are impacting everyone in the community, evicting people from encampments is costly and ineffective.

- ✓ *With no daytime drop-in centers or low barrier shelters – and relatively few shelter beds of any kind – Tulare County has a very large population of people who live outside because they have nowhere else to go. With 576 people living outside on a given night, the community has some of the highest rates of unsheltered homelessness in the state, compared with other local CoCs.⁴⁶*
- ✓ *The Tulare County community is spending significant resources on enforcement approaches. Unfortunately, these approaches do not help address the growing number*

⁴⁶ In 2019, 71% of people experiencing homelessness in Tulare County were unsheltered, as compared with San Joaquin County (59%), Stanislaus County (57%), and Kern County (61%). See Part III (“How Many People Are Experiencing Homelessness in Tulare County?”).

of people who are homeless in Tulare County. To stem the growth in homelessness, the community needs more street and encampment outreach, homelessness prevention, and supportive housing options.

Systems in Place to Support the No Place Like Home (NPLH) Program

Tulare County is well positioned to support the No Place Like Home (NPLH) Program and develop permanent supportive housing for individuals living with serious mental illness who are homeless, chronically homeless, or at-risk of chronic homelessness.

The Current System

Collecting and Reporting No Place Like Home Data

Tulare County currently has many of the systems in place to collect the data required to satisfy NPLH program guidelines. The data is collected through both the CoC and the County. Moving forward, the two entities will determine how best to collaborate and share learnings and information to best serve individuals through NPLH.

The HMIS in Tulare County is operated by Kings United Way and uses ClientTrack, a robust system for administering data, including for the NPLH Program. HMIS tracks universal and program-specific data for all projects funded through the CoC and other sources. HMIS data can be easily accessed and aggregated for the submission of annual compliance reports, demographic data required by §214(e) of the NPLH program guidelines, and project performance reports. The County has plans to gather information from property managers and lead service providers, as appropriate, to complete the necessary NPLH reports and audits.

In addition, HHSA annually collects data and reports on mental health program and expenditures in the Tulare County Mental Health Services Act Three-Year Integrated Program and Expenditure Plan to the State for the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA). Within that report, HHSA addresses a number of key activities targeted at serving people in the County at risk of or experiencing homelessness, including provision of community services and supports, supportive housing, and specialized mental health services. In 2017/2018, the County developed a more expanded demonstration of data, outcomes, and consumer experiences and expressed an intent to continue to more thoroughly develop outcomes across all programs to more comprehensively demonstrate success in future MHSA plans.

Included in the effort to expand and improve data collection, the County has introduced two evidence-based outcome tools, one for children and one for adults. As efforts are underway to improve service to NPLH target populations, the CoC and County HHSA together can undertake efforts to better track people as they are served in all systems in the County, coordinate more effectively across systems, and identify barriers and additional partnerships to track outcomes for special populations.

Equal Access through Coordinated Entry

People experiencing homelessness will be referred to any NPLH-funded units via the Every Door Open Coordinated Entry System. All referrals are made on a nondiscriminatory basis. The system is widely advertised in English and Spanish in order to reduce language barriers and is designed to create a centralized queue that prioritizes the most intensive interventions and placements for the most vulnerable individuals and families.

Every Door Open coordinates local resources and assesses individuals to determine their homelessness status, vulnerability factors, housing needs, risks of harm, and interaction with emergency services. Further, Every Door Open has multiple access points, including but not limited to outreach teams, 2-1-1, partner agencies, housing navigators and homeless service providers. The CoC has implemented HUD's Equal Access Rule and is consistently working to identify and address any access issues. Lastly, Every Door Open works to prioritize individuals for placement who have experienced chronic homelessness or demonstrate high service needs.

Publicly Posted Plan

A Ten-Year Plan, "Connecting the Dots," was launched in 2011 and is currently available on the Kings/Tulare Homeless Alliance website. Tulare County has made significant progress on the Strategic Plan and it is now time to reflect and identify next steps. This Strategic Plan, "Pathway Home: Responding to Homelessness in Tulare County," will serve to update and enhance the 2011 strategic plan and will be accessible to the public on the websites of the Tulare Countywide Task Force on Homelessness and the Kings/Tulare Homeless Alliance.

Challenges to Serving NPLH Target Population

Many persons experiencing homelessness who are part of the NPLH Target Population are also among Tulare County's residents with the most extensive experience of homelessness. They face similar challenges to those described above, including disconnect from the systems of care and challenges accessing resources not dedicated for people experiencing homelessness. Challenges in accessing and serving individuals in this population often include:

- ✓ *Extensive lived experience of homelessness, often in remote locations across Tulare County*
- ✓ *Limited transportation options for individuals outside of urban areas*
- ✓ *Insufficient integration between systems, programs and services that support households with multiple, complex needs*

A general challenge for people in the NPLH Target Population is that they may have difficulty receiving the treatment they need to address their mental or emotional health issues. An assessment by the Tulare County HHSA found that the County experiences a shortage of specialty medical care providers, including mental health providers.⁴⁷ The shortage limits access

⁴⁷ 2017 Tulare County Community Health Assessment; available at: [https://tchhsa.org/eng/assets/File/Public%20Health/Tulare%20County%20CHA%20\(2017_03_28\)%20FINAL.pdf](https://tchhsa.org/eng/assets/File/Public%20Health/Tulare%20County%20CHA%20(2017_03_28)%20FINAL.pdf). The report states

to providers and results in lengthy wait times for referrals. In addition, more resources are needed to more fully serve people who experience compound barriers of homelessness, mental health disorders, and who do not speak English.

that while the California statewide average for mental health providers is 281 per 100,000 residents, Tulare County only has 216 per 100,000 residents.

V. SOLUTIONS TO HOMELESSNESS IN TULARE COUNTY

Communities across California are watching friends, co-workers and family members struggle to meet their basic needs, including keeping a roof over their heads. While the Tulare County community has made meaningful progress in setting up a homeless response that has prevented or ended homelessness for hundreds of residents, significantly more investment is needed to fully address the impacts of homelessness across the county.

Priorities and Goals for Effectively Addressing Homelessness

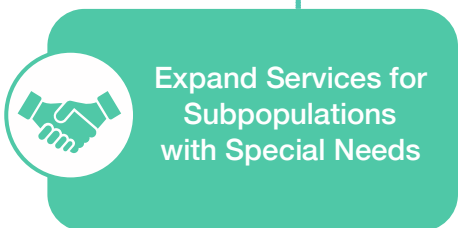
This strategic planning process has involved extensive community engagement, review of the data, and research to better understand our current homelessness system of care. Based on that information and feedback, the community identified Five Goals that will be critical to effectively address homelessness over the next five years.





Expand Permanent Housing: Permanent housing – and the supports needed to retain and maintain it – is the solution to homelessness. By expanding permanent housing options, such as Permanent Supportive Housing and Rapid Rehousing, hundreds more people in Tulare County will have a home that provides security and protection – hand-in-hand with the vital supports many residents require to achieve stability and long-term self-sufficiency.

Address Unsheltered Homelessness: Connecting and building trust with people experiencing homelessness is essential in a region where more than 71% live without shelter – on the streets, in cars, under bridges, by the river. By expanding outreach, targeting services, and developing crisis shelters throughout the area, the community will focus attention and resources to help those most in need get the services and support they require.



Support Subpopulations with Special Needs: Within Tulare County, there are residents at risk of or experiencing homelessness who require special attention. By directing services to people who need more focused and tailored care, the community will ensure that the system is accessible to some of the most vulnerable members in need.

Prevent Homelessness: Often many people at risk of homelessness need a minimal amount of help or intervention to retain their housing. Whether it is one-time financial resources to provide a security deposit, legal assistance to prevent eviction, or help learning to balance a budget, the more the system can provide supports and services to prevent homelessness in the first place, the more the community will be able to use the limited resources on hand to end homelessness altogether – while at the same time protecting additional individuals and families from the traumas associated with homelessness.



Deepen Partnerships and Engagement: Strengthening and building leadership and community support for solutions to homelessness will enable our community to effectively accomplish more, better, faster. Collaboration across different regions within the County can expand understanding of the causes of homelessness and identify the most effective approaches to address it. A stronger network can also celebrate success, reflect and course correct, and monitor and evaluate to ensure continued progress.



GOAL 1: INCREASE ACCESS TO PERMANENT HOUSING FOR PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

Measure 1: An additional **400 new Permanent Supportive Housing** opportunities – with at least 200 built and an additional 200 in the pipeline – and **200 new Rapid Rehousing** opportunities are available for people experiencing homelessness in Tulare county.

Measure 2: **Reduce by 25%** the average length of time between assessing a person for need to the time they are matched to a program or services (from a 286.5 day average).

Measure 3: **Reduce by 25%** the average length of time between when a person is matched to a program or services to the time they are actually housed (from a 65.48 day average).

1

Increase Access to Permanent Housing for People Experiencing Homelessness

Strategy 1.1 – Increase the development of units available for Permanent Supportive Housing for Tulare County residents with disabilities who need intensive supportive services to retain housing.

Strategy 1.2 – Expand flexibility and availability of resources to subsidize and operate supportive housing for people exiting homelessness.

Strategy 1.3 – Expedite households' ability to make quick use of available resources to attain permanent housing.

Strategy 1.4 – Increase participating landlords and rental units that are available to people exiting homelessness through landlord engagement and risk mitigation strategies.

Detailed Strategies and Next Steps:

Strategy 1.1 – Increase the development of units available for Permanent Supportive Housing for Tulare County residents with disabilities who need intensive supportive services to retain housing.

- 1.1.1. Establish a 5-year Countywide Housing Development Pipeline that identifies an achievable path to establish new housing so that households with members who have disabilities can exit homelessness and attain stability.

Next Steps Include:

- ✓ *Establish a Housing Committee of local developers, Housing Authority, city and county staff, and experienced service providers to develop and facilitate implementation of the Countywide Housing Development Pipeline.*
- ✓ *Secure commitment by each municipality to support development of a pro-rata portion of dedicated Permanent Supportive Housing inventory by the end of 2025.*
- ✓ *Develop systems to increase local capacity to respond quickly to development opportunities and expand capital funding and resources available to meet the development goals.*
- ✓ *See Appendix A for Proposed Action Plan.*

- 1.1.2 Evaluate the feasibility and next steps for non-traditional housing options, such as repurposed motels and accessory dwelling units.

Next Steps Include:

- ✓ *Ensure local zoning codes take advantage of changes in state laws to support development of “accessory” and “junior accessory” dwelling units and conduct a public outreach campaign to encourage homeowners to take advantage of these opportunities.*
- ✓ *Consider small homes options, e.g., Austin, TX model.*

Strategy 1.2 – Expand flexibility and availability of resources to subsidize and operate supportive housing for people exiting homelessness.

- 1.2.1 Engage all stakeholders, including cities, county agencies, and the CoC, in growing the federal and state funding available for supportive housing through new and existing programs.

Next Steps Include:

- ✓ *Evaluate uses of existing and new federal/state funding streams that could be invested in long term solutions to reduce the impacts of homelessness.*
- ✓ *Jurisdictions and agencies stay aware of new opportunities and plan to apply for funding.*
- ✓ *Ensure local resources are available to match federal and state funding opportunities to take advantage of these resources.*
- ✓ *Strengthen competitiveness for federal and state funding opportunities, including by demonstrated adoption of a strategic plan, implementation of best practices, and tracking progress.*

- 1.2.2 Direct mainstream supportive service resources toward ending homelessness, including Medi-Cal and Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) funding.

Next Steps Include:

- ✓ *Maximize mainstream vouchers and other housing subsidies that can be used to address homelessness in order to increase total resources available for supportive housing.*
- ✓ *Conduct an analysis of funding streams that can be used for housing resources and supportive services to identify opportunities to enhance alignment – e.g., ensuring Medi-Cal is optimized.*

- 1.2.3 Continue growing the Moving on Program in partnership with the Housing Authority to use vouchers to open up supportive housing for households who need intensive services.

Strategy 1.3 – Expedite households' ability to make quick use of available resources to attain permanent housing.

- 1.3.1 Continue development and expansion of the Flexible Housing Fund program, which provides financial support to individuals and families with moving costs, addresses the limitations of housing subsidies to respond to rapidly rising housing costs, and tackles other financial barriers that can prevent people from successfully exiting homelessness.

Next Steps Include:

- ✓ *Monitor and evaluate the success and challenges of the recently launched Flexible Housing Fund pilot project to track outcomes, identify most efficient uses of resources, and demonstrate success.*
- ✓ *Expand the fund to continue serving an increasing number of households each year.*

- 1.3.2 Strengthen access to resources to support households with expungement, credit assistance, and document readiness to ensure they can use available housing subsidies as quickly as possible.
- 1.3.3 Establish a shared housing program that can increase the housing available to single adults by using 2- and 3-bedroom homes for single adults exiting homelessness.

Strategy 1.4 – Increase participating landlords and rental units that are available to people exiting homelessness through landlord engagement and risk mitigation strategies.

- 1.4.1 Invest in staffing to develop and lead a year-round landlord engagement campaign to educate the public and recruit landlords.

Next Steps Include:

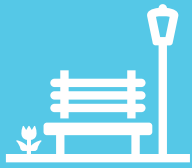
- ✓ *Develop an annual plan for an ongoing landlord engagement campaign, with collective messaging, outreach strategies, reporting dashboards, and a plan for monitoring and improvement.*
- ✓ *Undertake an outreach and communications campaign to support landlords in understanding the benefits of partnership and risk mitigation approaches.*
- ✓ *Additional strategies may include recognition programs by elected officials, landlord legal resources/classes, landlord participation bonuses, and presentations by participating landlords who have had positive experiences serving formerly homeless residents.*
- ✓ *Ensure all case managers are trained on landlord relationship development and retention, expand housing specialist positions, and train all agencies and staff on landlord engagement talking points.*

- 1.4.2 Expand the landlord mitigation program to increase resources and support to landlords who rent to people exiting homelessness.

Next Steps Include:

- ✓ *Engage private partners, such as service agencies and the faith community, to contribute resources to the Landlord Mitigation and Flexible Housing Funds by bringing greater awareness of the programs, highlighting successful efforts with landlords and sharing information about the cost-savings to the community and positive impact for people who exited homelessness.*
- ✓ *Strengthen resources for supporting housing retention and landlord engagement after households have exited homelessness to cultivate positive landlord relationships for the long-term, including:*

- ✓ *Expand intensive case management supports for housed individuals with high needs, and*
- ✓ *Increase provider training to prioritize landlord relationship development and crisis support.*



GOAL 2: INCREASE ACCESS TO CRITICAL SERVICES TO SUPPORT TULARE COUNTY'S HOMELESS RESIDENTS EXIT HOMELESSNESS

Measure 1: 115 new housing-focused low-barrier shelter beds are available to people experiencing homelessness in Tulare County.

Measure 2: Fewer than 50% of households experiencing homelessness in Tulare County are living without shelter.

Measure 3: Over 50% of households served by street outreach, crisis shelters, transitional housing, and Rapid Rehousing programs exit to permanent housing destinations.

Measure 4: At least 40% of households in homeless-dedicated crisis shelter and housing programs have some form of income.

2

Increase Access to Critical Services to Support Tulare County's Homeless Residents Exit Homelessness

Strategy 2.1 – Expand housing-focused crisis shelter options for households experiencing homelessness.

Strategy 2.2 – Establish a mobile multi-disciplinary program to support health and wellness and provide connections to benefits and other resources to exit homelessness.

Strategy 2.3 – Expand effectively coordinated countywide street and encampment outreach.

Strategy 2.4 – Deepen housing-focused emphasis and programming at locations people experiencing homelessness regularly access.

Detailed Strategies and Next Steps

Strategy 2.1 – Expand housing-focused crisis shelter options for households experiencing homelessness.

- 2.1.1 Establish at least three new housing-focused crisis shelters (one in each of Tulare County’s three largest jurisdictions), that use evidence-based practices to support households in exiting homelessness, minimize barriers that prevent people from participating, and are open around the clock to provide resources, services and a space for people to remain during the day.

Next Steps Include:

- ✓ *Create jurisdictional action committees in each major municipality to develop and implement a local plan, coordinate across jurisdictions, and report to the Countywide Task Force.*
- ✓ *See Appendix B for Proposed Action Plan.*

- 2.1.2 Evaluate approaches for increasing crisis shelter options for special populations.

Next Steps Include:

- ✓ *Work with hospitals to increase medical respite beds for discharging and medically fragile individuals.*
- ✓ *Establish a safe parking program for individuals and families experiencing vehicular homelessness.*
- ✓ *Explore bridge housing approaches for youth, families and other special sub-populations based in a multi-bedroom home shared housing model.*

Strategy 2.2 – Establish a mobile multi-disciplinary program to support health and wellness and provide connections to benefits and other resources to exit homelessness.

- 2.2.1 Create a mobile outreach van program that includes medical, behavioral health, and housing navigation services and can access people experiencing homelessness outside of urban areas.

Next Steps Include:

- ✓ *Evaluate options for obtaining an outreach van, including a community-based “Call to Service” fundraising campaign with service organizations and faith-based partners who may be interested in sponsoring the program, to grow community engagement in addressing homelessness.*
- ✓ *Explore approaches for publicizing community support (e.g., printing supporting organizations’ names on the van), and locating the van on the*

property of volunteering community groups for a weekly rotating schedule across the region.

- ✓ *Coordinate multiple service providers, such as KTHA Housing Navigators and HHSA public health and mental health services for the mobile outreach program.*

Strategy 2.3 – Expand effectively coordinated countywide street and encampment outreach.

- 2.3.1 Expand available outreach programs in each jurisdiction to reach more households who are disconnected from services and provide intensive engagement and support, including dedicated outreach in Porterville and City of Tulare areas.
- 2.3.2 Ensure existing outreach teams provide access to housing-focused case management, Coordinated Entry, HMIS, public benefits enrollment and other critical housing-focused resources.

Strategy 2.4 – Deepen housing-focused emphasis and programming at locations people experiencing homelessness regularly access.

- 4.4.1 Ensure staff trained on housing-focused approaches and housing navigation are available at crisis shelters, day centers, transit centers and libraries, and workforce development one-stop locations.
- 4.4.2 Establish a shared community-wide understanding across all homelessness service providers of best practices for implementing housing-focused approaches, including housing-focused case planning.
- 4.4.3 Continue strengthening coordination with mainstream (non-homeless-dedicated) resources such as legal aid, credit repair services, public benefits advocacy and appeals, workforce development and community volunteers.

Next Steps Include:

- ✓ *Work with mainstream providers to identify gaps and opportunities for enhancing access to housing-focused services for households in exiting homelessness.*



GOAL 3: EXPAND SERVICES FOR SUBPOPULATIONS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Measure 1: Fewer than 10% of formerly homeless households return to homelessness within one year after exiting to permanent housing.

Measure 2: Double the number of transitional age youth (16-24 years old) served by street outreach, emergency shelters, and supportive housing programs.

Measure 3: Reduce by 50% the number of persons age 55+ who are unsheltered.

3

Expand Services for Subpopulations with Special Needs

Strategy 3.1 – Anticipate and address the growing needs of older adults experiencing homelessness in Tulare County.

Strategy 3.2 – Strengthen the system of care targeting youth and young adults to ensure culturally competent service delivery and engagement.

Strategy 3.3 – Evaluate, track, and implement training and program modifications to address disparities in system access and service provision for special subpopulations, including for people of color, non-English speakers, and persons identifying as LGBTQ+.

Detailed Strategies and Next Steps

Strategy 3.1 – Anticipate and address the growing needs of older adults experiencing homelessness in Tulare County.

- 3.1.1 Support better connections to clinical diagnosis and disability documentation for seniors to establish eligibility for SSI, including strengthening system of clinicians trained in working with people experiencing homelessness with complex needs.
- 3.1.2 Identify and build connections with existing housing resources for seniors to support older adults experiencing homelessness.

Strategy 3.2 – Strengthen the system of care targeting youth and young adults to ensure culturally competent service delivery and engagement.

- 3.2.1 Conduct youth focus groups to identify priority needs and gaps in system accessibility for youth experiencing homelessness in Tulare County.
- 3.2.2 Monitor impact of the new Visalia youth Dream Center and consider expanding the model to Porterville and/or Tulare City.
- 3.2.3 Expand partnerships with schools and colleges, the child welfare system, the juvenile justice system, and runaway and homeless youth providers to address gaps and ensure coordinated and culturally competent access to a youth-informed system of care.

Next Steps Include:

- ✓ *Ensure youth access to Coordinated Entry and supportive housing resources, outreach and crisis shelter, and behavioral health and other supportive services.*
- ✓ *Consider Host Homes, TH-RRH or other models to increase options for youth experiencing homelessness.*

Strategy 3.3 – Evaluate, track, and implement training and program modifications to address disparities in system access and service provision for special subpopulations, including for people of color, non-English speakers, and persons identifying as LGBTQ+.

- 3.3.1 Assess and evaluate racial disparities in service access and provision, including in numbers receiving Coordinated Entry System assessment, matched to a housing program, entering housing, and retaining housing.

Provide cultural humility and implicit bias trainings and support for Coordinated Entry and direct service program staff, including outreach, emergency shelter, housing navigation, and housing program staff.

- 3.3.2 Add or modify Point in Time Count and HMIS measures to collect targeted data about special subpopulations, including persons identifying as LGBTQ+.

Next Steps Include:

- ✓ *Conduct focus groups and planning sessions to strategically expand PIT and HMIS coverage for tailored tracking of special populations.*
- ✓ *Enhance tracking of LGBTQ+ population experiencing homelessness by adding questions to the communitywide survey, engaging peer outreach, and leveraging peers in identifying locations for PIT.*
- ✓ *Ensure subpopulation fields in HMIS are tailored and being used by staff conducting intake. Train intake staff on cultural competency and ensuring equal access.*



GOAL 4: PREVENT HOMELESSNESS FOR THOSE AT RISK

Measure 1: After 2020, the number of people experiencing homelessness for the first time will be **reduced by 5% each year**, achieving a 20% annual reduction by 2025.

Measure 2: **Reduce by 50%** the number of households that return to homelessness in 6 months after exiting to permanent housing.

4

Prevent Homelessness for Those at Risk

Strategy 4.1 – Establish a coordinated homelessness prevention and problem solving (homelessness diversion) system to help people at high risk of homelessness remain housed.

Strategy 4.2 – Strengthen partnerships with criminal justice, child welfare, and healthcare systems to coordinate support for households at high risk of homelessness.

Strategy 4.3 – Increase support for formerly homeless households with intensive service needs to attain long-term housing stability.

Strategy 4.4 – Expand access to income, including employment and benefits, for people experiencing homelessness and recently homeless households.

Detailed Strategies and Next Steps

Strategy 4.1 – Establish a coordinated homelessness prevention and problem solving (homelessness diversion) system to help people at high risk of homelessness remain housed.

- 4.1.1 Develop prevention system protocols for identifying, prioritizing, and serving households at risk of homelessness.

Next Steps Include:

- ✓ *Pilot a countywide assessment tool (PR-VI-SPDAT) to prioritize households at risk for homelessness and establish eligibility criteria.*
- ✓ *Conduct a system mapping process that can identify “intercepts” or points of contact within the social services systems to strengthen access to households at risk.*

- 4.1.2 Identify and align resources for prevention and identify gaps in availability of crucial resources.

Next Steps Include:

- ✓ *Work with 2-1-1 to inventory the available prevention resources countywide and strengthen coordination across prevention partners.*
- ✓ *Increase resources available for temporary crisis assistance and landlord mediation to prevent homelessness.*

- 4.1.3 Train partners in problem solving conversation techniques.

- 4.1.4 Establish a monitoring protocol, including a field in HMIS to identify households who fall into homelessness for the first time, and to track impact of interventions.

Strategy 4.2 – Strengthen partnerships with criminal justice, child welfare, and healthcare systems to coordinate support for households at high risk of homelessness.

- 4.2.1 Support systems to identify and track people experiencing homelessness, and ensure cross-system partners are familiar with the Every Door Open Coordinated Entry System.

Strategy 4.3 – Increase support for formerly homeless households with intensive service needs to attain long-term housing stability.

- 4.3.1 Identify a sustainable funding source to continue the Housing Stabilization Pilot Program, providing intensive services for formerly homeless households with

extremely high needs in 2021 and beyond.

- 4.3.2 Expand availability of Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) teams to support Medi-Cal eligible households in retaining their housing and achieving long-term stability.

Next Steps Include:

- ✓ *Coordinate ACT and Housing Stabilization Programs with Coordinated Entry to prioritize households for support and leverage Medi-Cal resources.*

Strategy 4.4 – Expand access to income, including employment and benefits, for people experiencing homelessness and recently homeless households.

- 4.4.1 Monitor impact and consider expansion of the Environmental Cleanup Project (ECO), and evaluate other opportunities for supporting households in accessing entry level jobs.
- 4.4.2 Ensure all eligible program participants are enrolled in the public benefits for which they are eligible.

Next Steps Include:

- ✓ *Expedite access to clinicians who can provide disability documentation, including by ensuring clinicians are trained to work with people experiencing homelessness.*
- ✓ *Consider development of a program that helps connect municipal and county jobs with people with disabilities and participants of Rapid Rehousing programs.*



GOAL 5: STRENGTHEN PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNITY-WIDE PARTNERSHIPS TO ENSURE RESOURCES TO ADDRESS HOMELESSNESS ARE BEING USED AS EFFECTIVELY AS POSSIBLE

Measure 1: All incorporated municipalities and key stakeholder groups have adopted the **Strategic Plan to Address Homelessness** in Tulare County.

Measure 2: Stakeholders are working together communitywide to implement **a shared set of strategies to address homelessness** in line with the roadmap in the Strategic Plan.

5

Strengthen Public Engagement and Community-Wide Partnerships to Ensure Resources to Address Homelessness are Being Used as Effectively as Possible

Strategy 5.1 – Deepen public understanding of homelessness and its solutions.

Strategy 5.2 – Centralize the countywide homelessness response strategy to avoid duplication and get the most value out of limited resources.

Strategy 5.3 – Increase participation by key stakeholders and essential community partners in meaningful solutions to address homelessness in Tulare County.

Detailed Strategies and Next Steps

Strategy 5.1 – Deepen public understanding of homelessness and its solutions.

- 5.1.1 Roll out the Strategic Plan, using the process to support community-wide engagement and alignment around a single roadmap for next steps in addressing homelessness in Tulare County.
- 5.1.2 Coordinate endorsement of the Strategic Plan by key partners to support alignment around a shared set of goals and strategies to most effectively target homelessness.
- 5.1.3 Establish a year-round communication strategy to educate the public about homelessness and the local homelessness response, addressing common myths and celebrating progress in Strategic Plan implementation.

Strategy 5.2 – Centralize the countywide homelessness response strategy to avoid duplication and get the most value out of limited resources.

- 5.2.1 Leverage the Tulare Countywide Task Force on Homelessness to be the central, countywide coordinating body for developing, implementing, and monitoring the Strategic Plan's strategies to address homelessness in Tulare County.
- 5.2.2 Develop a year-round structure for Countywide Strategic Plan implementation and reporting.

Next Steps Include:

- ✓ *Establish a Countywide Task Force Steering Committee to lead the development of the communication strategy, coordinate the Task Force's Strategic Plan implementation process, and make recommendations to the Task Force.*
- ✓ *Create an annual implementation calendar that provides for:*
 - > *Identifying annual implementation goals, strategies of focus for the upcoming year and key stakeholders for those strategies.*
 - > *Establishing stakeholder committees as needed to achieve strategies of focus, with a process for regular updates to the Countywide Task Force.*
 - > *Annual or bi-annual analysis of progress in implementation of strategies of focus, identification of challenges and approaches for addressing challenges.*
- 5.2.3 Establish Jurisdictional Action Committees to coordinate local Strategic Plan implementation in each municipality and report to Countywide Task Force.

- 5.2.4 Establish a central “backbone” position, funded by each jurisdiction, to coordinate communitywide Strategic Plan implementation and progress.

Strategy 5.3 – Increase participation by key stakeholders and essential community partners in meaningful solutions to address homelessness in Tulare County.

- 5.3.1 Involve philanthropy, service organizations, and faith community in supporting critical initiatives such as public engagement and education campaigns, the flexible housing and risk mitigation funds, and volunteer opportunities.

Next Steps Include:

- ✓ *Support opportunities for community members to engage and connect with people experiencing homelessness, such as volunteer food service, that then connect to larger solution-focused campaigns.*
- ✓ *Coordinate an Impact or “Call to Service” Campaign across multiple entities, for example to fund and host rotating sites for a mobile van providing multi-disciplinary services. (See Strategy 2.2)*

- 5.3.2 Include diverse stakeholders in Strategic Plan implementation processes and committees to support engagement across sectors and ensure that all partners with a stake in addressing homelessness are part of the solution.

APPENDIX A

Proposed Action Plan for Strategy 1.1 (Increase Development of Units Available for Permanent Supportive Housing)

Activity	Steps	Responsible Parties	Timeline
Develop the Pipeline Plan and countywide leadership and commitment to fulfil its goals.	Establish a Housing Committee of local developers, Housing Authority, city and County staff, and experienced service providers to develop and facilitate implementation of the Countywide Housing Development Pipeline.	Countywide Task Force	2019
	Draft the Pipeline Plan.	Housing Committee	2020
	Secure commitment by each municipality to develop and/or fund a pro-rata portion of dedicated Permanent Supportive Housing inventory by the end of 2025.	Visalia, Porterville, Tulare City	2020

Develop systems to increase community capacity to respond quickly to development opportunities.	Conduct a Tulare County Request for Qualifications process to establish a pre-qualified pool of developers who have experience developing affordable and supportive housing.	County Board of Supervisors	2020
	Establish processes for jurisdictions to provide robust and frequent early identification of property, surplus property, and site inventory available or expected to come available for development, including properties in need of rehabilitation.	Visalia, Porterville, Tulare City, Dinuba	2020
	Develop local policies to fast-track affordable development into the already existing housing pipeline (e.g., CEQA exemptions, zoning by right, or reduce/deferred waiving impact development fees) and require housing development that is dedicated to Permanent Supportive Housing and Extremely Low-income Households.	Visalia, Porterville, Tulare City	2021
Expand capital funding and resources available to meet the development goals.	Expand locally-dedicated resources to provide matching resources to take advantage of state and federal opportunities, including exploring strategic opportunities to pool state or other resources across jurisdictions.	County, Visalia, Porterville, Tulare City	2020
	Expand availability of project-based vouchers, property and financial resources for capital.	Housing Authority, County	Ongoing
	Identify and apply for relevant state and federal funding or resource opportunities (e.g., Housing Authority vouchers).	County, Visalia, Porterville, Tulare City	2022

APPENDIX B

Proposed Action Plan for Strategy 2.1 (Expand Housing-Focused Crisis Shelter Options/Low Barrier Shelter)

Activity	Steps	Responsible Parties	Timeline
Establish a Jurisdictional Action Committee in each of the three largest city jurisdictions to coordinate priority strategies (e.g., Low-Barrier Shelter)	Establish a Jurisdictional Action Committee with key stakeholders necessary to successfully design, develop, and implement a crisis shelter, including elected representatives, city staff, HHSA and direct service provider partners.	County, Visalia, Porterville, Tulare City, Other Partners	2020
	Action committee representatives across jurisdictions meet monthly to coordinate and address challenges, and report to Countywide Task Force.	Jurisdictional Action Committees	Throughout
	Committees identify and coordinate resources from each partner (e.g., County services, state/federal funding, city-owned property, nonprofit service providers, etc.).	Jurisdictional Action Committees	2020

Develop a plan to establish a low barrier, housing-focused crisis shelter.	Identify potential physical sites accessible to transportation and services and work with partners to settle on a location.	Jurisdictional Action Committees	2020
	Identify potential sources of start-up and operating funding and resources, including the appropriate resources from each partner to support the shelter.	Jurisdictional Action Committees	2020
	Identify an operating agency (either an existing nonprofit, a nonprofit not currently operating in Tulare County, or a new agency).	Jurisdictional Action Committees	2020
Prepare for shelter launch	Mobilize support and community education and engagement to communicate the critical role and impact of housing-focused crisis shelters on addressing homelessness and its impacts on the community.	County, Visalia, Porterville, Tulare City, Other Partners	2020
	Establish operating policies, procedures and integrated service provision across multiple partners. Coordinate with and between service providers to ensure program participants are offered robust and integrated service delivery and housing-focused supports.	Operating agency, in collaboration with the Action Committee	2021
	Develop low barrier housing-focused policies and procedures and retain service staffing.	Operating agency	2021

APPENDIX C

Examples of Jurisdictional Priority Strategies for 2020

This strategic plan identifies an ambitious but achievable vision for meaningfully addressing homelessness over the next five years. In 2020, individual jurisdictions are encouraged to focus on the individual strategies that will be most effective in addressing homelessness locally. The following identifies recommended strategies/steps from the goals above that individual jurisdictions may choose as areas of focus.

Strategy	Steps
1.1 – Permanent Supportive Housing Development	Participate in development of 5-year Countywide Housing Development Pipeline plan & commit to supporting local allocation of PSH units. Explore opportunities such as small homes.
1.2 – Increase Resources Available for Supportive Housing	Ensure the community is accessing available state/federal resources: apply for new state/federal funding opportunities, identify sources of match funds, and evaluate opportunities to align existing federal/state resources to more effectively address homelessness.
2.1 – Expand Housing-Focused Crisis Shelter Options	Establish a housing-focused low barrier shelter that uses evidence-based practices to support people in exiting homelessness.
2.3 – Expand Effectively Coordinated Street and Encampment Outreach	Establish or expand dedicated homelessness outreach, such as a multi-disciplinary HOPE team of police and HHSA mental health ride-along staff (already exists in Visalia).

2.4 – Deepen Housing-Focused Programming

Support co-location of housing navigation staff and other housing-focused resources at drop-in sites, transit centers, and other locations regularly accessed by people experiencing homelessness.

5.1 – Deepen Public Understanding of Homelessness and Its Solutions

Endorse the Countywide Strategic Plan and support the local community in understanding the causes of homelessness, its solutions, and the strategic steps being taken locally to address the crisis.

5.2 – Centralize the Countywide Homelessness Response Strategy

Establish a local jurisdictional Action Committee on homelessness to support local implementation of key strategies and coordinate with the Countywide Task Force to avoid duplication and efficient use of resources.

Partner with other jurisdictions to fund a centralized “backbone” position to coordinate community-wide Strategic Plan implementation, and ensure progress, effective coordination of resources, and meaningful outcomes.